

COUNSELING JEWISH INTERCULTURAL FAMILIES:
A CHRISTIAN APPROACH

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GARRETT R. SMITH

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To some of God's most precious gifts to me,
my loving and supportive wife, Nici
and my wonderful children, Zachary, Daliya and Ilana

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ABSTRACT

Jewish intermarriage has become common in the United States where the non-Jewish partner is usually Christian at least by family upbringing. Though this is a frequent occurrence, the nature and unique stresses present in this type of family is not well-understood or explored within the counseling literature. The term Jewish intercultural families is used in this thesis rather than the more commonly used term, interfaith, because it is the emphasis of this thesis that while the couples' differences may contain a faith element, it is in essence a cultural difference. An approach is explored which encourages couples to think more broadly about the range of options available for them, by exploring five categories: identity, community, traditions, faith and extended family. Until recently, marriage and family therapists have been very reluctant to separate the ideas of religion, spirituality and culture. It is the conviction of this thesis that not only is this a critical part of helping Jewish intercultural families, but that a Christian approach to counseling in particular can help couples see the possibility of spiritual unity while maintaining communal and ethnic diversity.

INTRODUCTION

The question this thesis will attempt to answer is how to do counseling with Jewish intercultural couples and families from a Christian perspective. With over 50% of the Jewish community marrying non-Jewish people, mental health specialists are preparing clinicians for the unique needs of this demographic of families (Gleckman & Streicher, 1990). The Christian counseling community has yet to produce any academic work on the unique challenges and opportunities presented by Jewish intercultural families. The question of this thesis will be answered within a general framework set up for all marriage and family counseling theses at Gordon-Conwell: beginning with outlining a theoretical approach to marriage and family counseling followed by expositing a biblical and theological understanding of the practice, a review of relevant literature then concluding with the practical outworking of the approach in the conceptualization and therapy of a particular family.

The term “Jewish intercultural couples” refers specifically to couples where one member is Jewish and one is not. The approach will be most applicable within a Jewish American context where the non-Jewish member is most commonly Christian, at least by culture. This particular demographic presents a number of unique challenges for the Christian counselor.

The first challenge comes in defining the nature of the issue. This confusion is made apparent with the lack of common terminology in academic research: “Jewish-Christian couples” (Sussman & Alexander, 1999), “Interfaith Jewish Marriages” (Chinitz, 2001), “Couples where one partner is Jewish” (Horowitz, 1999), “Jewish intermarriage” (Gleckman & Streicher, 1990), “Marriage between Jews and non-Jews” (Eaton, 1994;

Mayer, 2002), “Jewish/Gentile Couples” (Wan & Zaretsky, 2004), “Interfaith marriage” (Shaffer, 2008), and “Jewish Gentile interfaith couples” (Leher, 2004). It is interesting to note that the term generally used to denote a couple with different cultures, “intercultural,” is changed to “interfaith” terminology when Jewish people were included. This further reflects the confusion noted in the 1996 edition of *Ethnicity and Family Therapy*, “Jewish families are unique among cultural groups because they constitute a curious mix of both religious and ethnic identity” (McGoldrick, p. 629). Another recent paper noted that Jews have been called a “religious group, a people, an ethnicity, a culture and a civilization” (Leher, 2004, p. 34). So the question of definition is determining whether the primary issue for Jewish intercultural couples is essentially religious with conflicting belief systems, or is it at its essence a difference in culture? Are the Jewish people an ethnic group or a religion? The confusion for academics and counselors mirrors what can be an even greater confusion within the couples themselves.

Another challenging issue is the way Jewish identity relates to beliefs. Jewish people may or may not practice Judaism or believe in God or keep kosher or even celebrate holidays. But when asked what makes them Jewish, American Jews tend to agree that it is, at the least, that they don’t believe in Jesus (Klinghoffer, 2006). Michelle Cohn, chair the Jewish Community Relations Council said responding to a Jews for Jesus evangelistic campaign in Palm Beach, “It’s simple. You cannot be a Jew and believe Jesus is the Messiah” (McCabe, 2003). So in couples where one member is Jewish and the other Christian, the questions relating to family, traditions and child rearing can become especially contentious when one member of the couple’s religious traditions and holidays may directly impact the other’s identity. This tension can then be transferred

into a struggle for identity within the children. Often in these couples as well, extended family may disapprove of the marriage, and may not provide support when difficulties in the marriage surface (Waldman, 2005; Eaton, 1994).

These intrinsic “religious” differences are then combined with a cultural difference which is often misunderstood or unanticipated. As Sandra Eaton (1994) said, “The major challenge to [Jewish] interfaith marriage lies in the fact that the partners tend to lack an understanding both of the cultural context and meaning of each other's behavior” (p. 211). Every marriage represents a blending of family traditions and even culture to some extent, but for intercultural situations this blending tension is more difficult as cultural and religious practices of the couple can be so divergent (Falicov, 1995). This can create stress and dissatisfaction within the couple as they make decisions about what religion to practice and what traditions to keep as a family. In intercultural situations, conflicting hidden expectations may also be heightened. Jewish/Christian couples represent an additional layer of complexity in their intercultural relationship because their complex religious and cultural mix of differences is further masked by an apparent homogeneity of color, language and culture (White, English-speaking, American). This may be why some researchers feel more comfortable using the term “interfaith” rather than “intercultural,” because they believe that Jewish/Christian couples are the same culture, namely, American. For this reason, one researcher said the Jews represent an “invisible minority” (Altman, 2010, p. 41). The extent of Jewish assimilation into American culture is deceptive, as Jewish culture remains a powerful influence even on more assimilated Jews who think of themselves as marginally Jewish (Schlossberger & Heckler, 1998).

There is the added complexity that as a specifically Christian counselor who maintains a biblical worldview, there exists a willingness and desire to share about faith in Jesus as a hope for a couple. It is the author's conviction as well that if a Jewish intercultural couple can come to a unified faith in Jesus, it gives great strength and stability to the family, which can enable them to better navigate their cultural differences and other relational difficulties. But even more so, a point of frustration and strain for many of these couples is that they simply do not see how they can have a common faith and spirituality, yet maintain their distinct cultural and family backgrounds and connection. A well-equipped Christian counselor can offer a unique perspective on this. Yet there is a need to be sensitive to the ethics surrounding the sharing of faith and values when a couple is in distress (AACC, 2004). Sensitivity is especially needed when one of the couple is Jewish, because even if the couple is relatively stable, introducing the issue of Jesus can cause a great deal of distress. When and how is it appropriate to encourage a unified faith in Jesus as an option?

In 1990 there was an article anticipating the need for mental health workers to be prepared for the unique needs of this growing population of families (Gleckman & Streicher). The need today is even greater than it was then. Jewish people are marrying non-Jewish people at an increasing rate. The 2001 American Jewish Identity Survey (AJIS) reported 51% of all Jewish adults who married since 1990 were married to Gentiles. Additionally, the AJIS revealed that 81% of all cohabiting Jews were living with Gentile partners. In Boston, where the author resides, the number of Jewish intermarried couples almost doubled between 1995 and 2005 (Steinhardt, 2006). This is as compared to a rate of 6% in 1960 (Gleckman & Streicher, 1990). The issues

surrounding these families are so pervasive in the Jewish community that a recent study done on adult children of intermarried couples suggested a new half-Jewish identity has begun to be formed and perhaps should be treated as a separate demographic (Buck, 2005). While there are probably no real definitive divorce rates for these couples, because of the problems in ascertaining divorce rates in general (Woldoff, 2003), various reports say the divorce rate could be as high as 75% (Lawler, 1999; Maller, 1975). Egon Mayer, the foremost sociologist on Jewish intermarriage (Crohn, 1998) found that Jews are twice as likely to divorce when marrying non-Jews (Sussman, 1999).

Jewish intercultural couples represent not only a significant challenge to Christian counselors but also a unique opportunity. As a Jewish Christian, the author looks at the Jewish people's resistance to hearing and responding to the gospel of Jesus as a very present concern. These couples, perhaps more than any other demographic within the Jewish community, have shown themselves open to hearing the gospel (Wan & Zaretsky, 2004). There has been very little written about counseling with this population and almost none from a Christian perspective. A well-equipped Christian counselor could offer a unique understanding of faith, culture and religion that can bring unity and healing to these families.

The author prefers the term "intercultural" to the more commonly used term "interfaith." This is because the term "interfaith" emphasizes the nature of the differences being about faith or belief. While it is true that there are generally two different religions involved in these families, this approach to these couples is not at its foundation about differences in belief, but rather in recognizing differences in culture. Certainly an aspect of this counseling approach will be about reconciling and bringing

understanding to couples with different belief systems. However, the approach of this thesis is that many of these couples wrongfully approach their marital and family struggles believing that the substance of their issues is belief. The approach here will be to help them move beyond this reduction, and see the issues and choices they need to make in a broader light.

CHAPTER 1

THEORETICAL APPROACH TO COUNSELING

This chapter will begin with an understanding of what constitutes a family followed by a theoretical orientation outlining an approach to working with Jewish intercultural families.

The Family

What constitutes a family? There are many approaches and responses to this question. Much of the debate has arisen because of the diversity of groups that call themselves families. Some of these would appear to threaten what has been called the “traditional” family. The traditional family is generally thought of as the “nuclear family,” the term for a household consisting of a married heterosexual couple and their children (Garland, 1999). If this is a family, questions immediately arise as to what this includes and does not include. Does this need to be a first marriage, or can this be a second marriage, and what about children from previous marriages? Do children from previous marriages need to be living in the geographical place of this new marriage to be considered part of the family? Is it best to include as many half-siblings, and step-children as possible in thinking of a family unit? What about extended family? How far does it extend? What about relationships like co-habiting or gay couples? When and how are those partners part of the family?

Yet for all this debate on exact definitions there is a general agreement that the family, however specifically defined, is an intimate form of social organization connected in some way through biology (birth) and/or a commitment of some kind, which transcends convenience and situation. A family is connected in some organic manner,

and functions in some manner as a whole. Society as well recognizes this connection and commitment and gives a wide variety of relationships certain privileges like tax breaks or hospital visitation, and may even hold a person jointly responsible with a “family” member economically. The debate within society of these privileges and responsibilities shows in itself the lack of an existing consistent definition of the family.

This paper will take a utilitarian approach to what constitutes a family. Therefore rather than applying a definition of what specific relationships are part of a family, it will be the nature of the relationships and how they function that make the determination of what constitutes the family, rather than biological or legal definitions. For example, a non-relative who has lived with the family for years plays an important part in the family system, perhaps more so than a sibling who has been out of the house and out of communication for ten years. The reason for taking this approach comes from the value in having a definition of the family to begin with. It is valuable to think in terms of a family because it is helpful to understand problems as not simply located with an individual, but rather as being affected and influenced by a family system (Friedman, 1985). Therefore, when defining the family, it is constructive to think in terms of those individuals who are impacting the family system. That is why a non-relative living within the home may have a much more significant impact than a sibling who has been out of contact for decades. But as stated before, the family is in its essence a core unit of social organization that is defined by a commitment to one another, most commonly established biologically.

Culture and Religion

An aspect of this thesis that will be returned to frequently is the need to help couples distinguish the concepts of culture, religion and faith. Culture is broadly defined as a common heritage or set of beliefs, norms, and values (DHHS, 2001). Cultural groups are defined in a variety of ways (e.g., by ethnicity, religion, geographic region); many people consider themselves as having multiple cultural identities (DHHS, 2001). While academic literature regularly differentiates between culture and religion, the contention of this thesis is that there is a hole in the existing research in terms of the conceptualization of religion. Researchers and therapists have tended to treat religion like a simple demographic without probing how religion actually operates in the individual's life (Simon, 2005; Walsh, 2009). Recently Walsh (2010) has been encouraging therapists to separate the ideas of religion and spirituality, recognizing that just because someone belongs to a particular religion, they could have any variety of personal spiritual practices. The contention of this thesis is that religion manifests itself differently in the lives of different individuals. Religion contains a large cultural component, which can be found in communal belonging, rituals, family traditions, music, food, and language among other things. These cultural components may or may not be connected to the spirituality and faith of that religious community. An individual may be strongly impacted by the culture of the religious community he or she was raised in but that does not necessarily indicate to what extent he or she may adhere to beliefs and spiritual practices.

Within the world of American Jewish intercultural families there can be a great variety of families. Some Jewish people are very religious, but many Jewish people are

not very religious or observant of Jewish law. This is true by the very definition of Jewish intercultural couples, because to marry a non-Jew is against Jewish law. But a Jewish person's religious ambivalence should not be mistaken for ambivalence towards their sense of Jewish identity. A Jewish person may not attend synagogue, or display many visible signs of Jewish culture, yet they may still feel very threatened by going into a church. Ironically, it can be Jewish people with no outside signs of "Jewishness" that have the strongest feelings of fear regarding things "Christian." It is possible that it is precisely because they have very little religious and traditional affiliation that their sense of Jewish identity feels vulnerable and elicits a strong negative response to things non-Jewish. Also, Jewish culture is different from Judaism, the Jewish religion. Culture is often, by its nature, unseen by the individual and the expectations of an individual's culture can be hidden from their consciousness (Markham, 1994). Therefore, it is possible and not uncommon, for Jewish people to have behavior and expectations influenced by Jewish culture, but have little or no connection to Judaism.

The Gentile, or Christian, member of the couple also represents a heterogeneous group. Many Christian churches are much like the Jewish world in that they are a mix of ethnic culture and religion. Examples of these would include the Irish Catholic, Armenian Orthodox, Russian Orthodox, Italian Catholic and Greek Orthodox churches (Joanides, 2002). There are Protestant communities like Amish, Mennonite, German Lutheran or Scottish Presbyterians for which this is also true.

It is also helpful to differentiate evangelical Christians from other Christians. Evangelicals may be a part of mainline Protestant churches or part of independent churches, but what they hold in common is a strong belief element to their Christianity.

National Associations of Evangelicals website (2009) characterize evangelicals as those who see the need for a conversion or “born-again experience” and as who see the Bible as their ultimate authority. In Jewish intercultural couples where one member is evangelical, there is a distinct pressure related to the need to believe in Jesus, which is as written earlier, the one faith element a Jewish person cannot believe. For non-evangelical Christians, there are still many cultural differences and strains, but the pressure specifically around the need to believe in Jesus may not be as present.

General Theoretical Approach

The approach to Jewish intercultural families will not be dominated by any one theory or methodology of psychotherapy but rather be an integration of theories. In particular, there are three schools of therapy, which can uniquely contribute to helping Jewish intercultural families: psycho-systemic, narrative, and solution-focused. These therapies will be integrated under the broad umbrella of a cognitive behavioral approach. Each of these theories will be discussed followed by an outline of how the therapy will be practically applied.

Systems Therapy

Psycho-systemic therapy has a very valuable contribution to make in approaching Jewish intercultural families. Systems therapy is a broad approach, which was largely the impetus for the beginning of family therapy. It has developed into many specific schools of psychotherapy (Lynn, 1985), but it will be used here in its most broad applications. When Doug Hall (1999) tries to help students understand the nature of systems theory he likes to ask students about the difference between a toaster and a cat:

You can disassemble and reassemble the toaster and nothing is lost. You might be able to find a loose wire or a bad switch and get it working again. It's all a matter of getting the parts properly lined up and working. But suppose there is something wrong with your cat. The cat, you soon realize, is an interrelated system. It cannot be thought of in the same way as we think of a toaster. Don't get out the toolbox. And do not try to disassemble and reassemble the cat! (p. 4)

The basic idea behind systems theory is striving to see structures as a whole (Friedman, 1985), rather than as a collection of individual parts. The significance of this comes especially in how one approaches problems. Traditionally, in basic cause and effect or linear thinking, the problem is found then fixed. Systems theory would suggest the need to be careful when problems are fixed in a linear cause and effect manner, because there will likely be unintended consequences to the "fix" and the cause of the problem is probably much more complex than what was diagnosed and the best hope for a solution lies in observing the system as a whole.

An elderly friend, Martin, had a serious health issue and was rushed to the hospital and admitted. The doctors were concerned about his kidneys so they were monitoring him carefully through the night, frequently waking him up to administer various medications and take various tests. He was getting worse, so the medical care became more urgent and frequent. Martin was convinced that the process of being in the hospital was causing him more damage through stress and sleeplessness than the benefit he was receiving. So he decided to pull out his IV and go home, despite the desperate pleas of his doctor. Within two days of home rest, his apparent slide ceased and he began to recover. The doctors were looking at specific problems he was having and trying to

fix them with medications through a linear cause and effect approach, ignoring the unintended consequences to his “system” by depriving him of sleep. Martin took a systems approach and sought a solution to the problem that was far more indirect, but affected the interrelated needs of his body.

A systems approach requires that people move away from an event-oriented, reactive way of problem solving, recognizing that linear thinking solutions will most often create unintended consequences, making the problems worse. While systems thinking can appear pessimistic because of the fear of making changes that cause more problems, it also promotes the idea of “leverage.” Leverage is the hope “that small, well focused actions can produce significant, enduring improvements” (Senge, 1990, p. 64). This occurred in the example of Martin’s complex medical condition improving by the relatively simply solution of getting more sleep.

Family therapy. The application of systems theory to psychotherapy is an exciting one that holds great promise. Humans are complex beings, not only in their physical beings but also in their social systems. Communities, churches, families and even friendships exist within complex systems, and also cannot be thought of in terms of simple cause and effect. C.S. Lewis (1994) spoke about the irony of what resulted from the death of a good friend of his. He wrote,

In each of my friends there is something that only some other friend can fully bring out. By myself I am not large enough to call the whole man into activity; I want other lights than my own to show all his facets. Now that Charles is dead, I shall never again see Ronald’s reaction to a specifically Caroline joke. Far from

having more of Ronald, having him “to myself” now that Charles is away, I have less of Ronald. (p. 246)

A common sense linear approach to relationships might have predicted that Lewis would have become closer to Ronald since their common friend Charles was no longer with them. Instead, since Charles was a critical part of their relational system, when he left, the system changed.

If we take a systems approach to family therapy it will dramatically change the traditional approach of psychotherapy. Friedman (1985) writes,

This approach [to family therapy] deemphasizes the notion that our conflicts and anxieties are due primarily to the makeup of our personalities, and suggests, instead, that our individual problems have more to do with our relational networks, the makeup of others’ personalities, where we stand within the relational systems, and how we function within that position. It understands the symptom bearer to be only the “identified” patient and the person’s problem to be symptomatic of something askew in the family itself. (p. 13)

Modern psychotherapy, starting with Sigmund Freud, has been an intensely individually focused process with the therapist trying to make conscious the unconscious conflicts of the individual. Later, many theories and psychotherapies developed which used varying methods. Some stressed affirmation, others behavior, while others dealt with changing the way individuals think. But all of these approaches are primarily concerned with the individual in isolation. While Friedman (1985) acknowledges that family therapy is part of that explosion of therapies, its basis in systems thinking makes the approach come from a very different perspective, or “different faith entirely” (p. 14).

Another therapist writes, “Trying to describe human communication in families, the simple cause-effect theories of ... psychoanalysis and behavior therapy proved to be too limited and limiting” (Spronck, 1997, p. 20).

Application to counseling with Jewish intercultural families. A key aspect of systems thinking that will influence this approach in dealing with marriage and family problems is to place the issues within a larger extended family system. Particularly in intercultural situations, it is critical to include the extended family within the system, taking a multigenerational approach that considers family functioning to be patterns of behavior which are, to some degree, passed on (Lynn, 1985). This is particularly important when the patterns of behavior may be directly related to cultural issues. For example, the grandchild of Holocaust survivors may still be impacted in some way from the trauma of their grandparents, even if they are dead. Trauma may have been transmitted through their parent in some way, and also indirectly from the larger Jewish community.

A technique of systems therapy is the use of genograms (McGoldrick, 2008). Genograms can aid in better understanding the history and functioning of the extended family systems. With Jewish intercultural families it is particularly helpful to use a genogram to look for ways culture and religious history of the extended families may have an unrecognized impact on the family.

Narrative Therapy

The most significant figures in the development of narrative therapy are Australian Michael White and David Epston of New Zealand. Their work was largely developed during the 1970s and 1980s. Narrative therapy has become widespread in North America

in the last 15 years, particularly after 1990 and the publishing of White and Epston's book, *Narrative Means to Therapeutic Ends*. There is considerable diversity within the theories and articulations of narrative therapy. It is probably best understood as an approach rather than a consistent theory. It draws heavily on the philosophy of Michel Foucault in its theory that humans construct stories to make sense of their experience and therefore "knowledge is socially constructed by a group" (Bloos & O'Connor, 2002, p. 224). Each person has many stories or narratives about how they understand different aspects of their life. According to narrative therapy, people come seeking help when there is a problem that they cannot overcome. The problem is embedded in a narrative, or story. The task of narrative therapy is to help the person discover alternative narratives about themselves. A goal is to discover moments when the problem did not exist or times when the person was able to defeat the problem and then encourage the constructing of an alternative story of success against the problem. The story of success is then to become the client's dominant story of understanding their life and reality. Narrative therapists believe this shift in the understanding of the problem's relationship to the client's life is helpful in reducing the problem's impact.

Narrative therapy falls under the larger umbrella of family therapy. Narrative therapy does have some large deviations from a family systems model of therapy. In family systems theory, the "sick" person is the symptom bearer manifesting the problem or problems that exist in the family system as a whole. Narrative therapy rejects the notion that an individual's problem necessarily reflects more serious underlying family conflict (Corsini & Wedding, 2005). Narrative therapy sees the whole family as being oppressed by this problem rather than the symptom secretly protecting the family's

underlying problems. Therefore narrative therapy's "efforts are directed at getting all family members to unite in gaining control of their lives from the oppressive set of symptoms" (Corsini & Wedding, 2005, p. 388). Narrative therapy would not emphasize diving into the deep root of the problems, but rather be more concerned with replacing it with a positive narrative for their life that includes a victory over their problems. For narrative therapists, the way a person or family understands their reality is critical. What is the story, or narrative, they tell about themselves, their family and their world? Narrative therapists would see negative stories of defeat and hopelessness in a person's life as narratives needing to be replaced with positive stories of hope and success.

General theory. In order to understand narrative therapy, it is important to think beyond psychotherapy to postmodern philosophical trends and understandings about knowledge and society. The subtitle of one of the most influential and important books in the field is instructive: *Narrative Therapy: The Social Construction of Preferred Realities* by Jill Freedman and Gene Combs (1996). The key phrase is "social construction." Narrative therapy includes a political aspect in that it tends to place the problems of individuals within the context of the oppressions of society such as racism, patriarchy, or religion. Postmodernists believe there are limits in the ability of human beings to measure and describe the universe in a precise, absolute, and universally applicable way (Freedman & Combs, 1996). Therefore absolute values are avoided, and morals and ethics are regarded as social constructions, and one's experience is preeminent. Within narrative therapy, individuals are encouraged to see their problems as the result of oppressive social and personal constructions. They are then encouraged to create a preferred way of understanding themselves and experiences that is free from

the larger oppressive narratives of their society and their past, creating a preferred social construction.

Application to counseling with Jewish intercultural families. It is very helpful when working with Jewish intercultural families to see that narratives or stories people have about themselves are not always located in their family, but often do reflect larger societal evils. Racism, sexism, classism, materialism, etc. are realities in society that can have an oppressive effect on an individual and affect the way they see themselves and the world around them. It is helpful to identify these narratives and seek to re-order them. This is also particularly true of Jewish intercultural families who will need to specifically gain insight into the way their respective cultures and religious upbringings have affected their expectations of one another and their interactions. In Jewish families in particular, concerns about anti-Semitism and past historical oppression at the hands of Christians can often influence the way that Jewish people interpret behaviors and events involving their Christian spouse and extended family. For instance, a Holocaust survivor went to a Christmas church service but was unable to focus on the service, convinced that the people attending were anti-Semitic and frightened they would discover she was Jewish. It can be beneficial to couples to bring in some history of societal evils to help a couple together find new narratives as to how to understand each other's behavior and struggles.

Insight might also be gained from thinking in terms of narratives or stories. It is certainly true that our understanding of events that happen in our lives is through the filter of how we see who we are. As Nichols and Schwartz (2001) write,

In keeping with the expression, "To a man with a hammer, everything looks like a nail," a man whose narrative says that he's incompetent chalks up successes to

dumb luck or to having fooled people once again... Trying to get a man to change his behavior without addressing his overarching life story is futile. (p. 389)

In the same way, conflicts that may exist in a Jewish intercultural couple may exist more in the narratives the couple places around the events, rather than in the actual events themselves. For example, one Christian wife would frequently feel tension from the conflict she perceived her husband was having with his father. She would hear them argue frequently over the phone. Her Jewish husband could not understand her concerns, insisted he had no conflict with his father, and was upset with his wife for thinking he did. It was helpful to the couple to create a new narrative about the events that was informed by their various cultural norms. It was suggested that it is not uncommon for Jewish families to have very intense, opinionated discussions that verge on arguments, but, far from being a sign of a distressed relationship, it is a sign of closeness. In a Jewish family, ironically a lack of strong opinionated discussion may be a sign of distance, not of harmony. At this suggestion, the Jewish husband agreed that this was the case with his father and that was why he felt close to his father rather than in conflict. The Christian wife expressed how completely different this was to her family's interactions growing up and why it had concerned her so much. So together, the couple was able to create a new narrative around this recurring event. The Christian wife was now able to hear the "arguments" on the phone between her husband and father-in-law with a smile, and see it as a sign of closeness and care rather than an indication of conflict and enmity.

The technique of externalizing the problem may also be helpful. It can enable the family to take a lighter, less stressed approach to a deadly problem, while also enabling

them to see their own family system in positive ways rather than becoming overcome by the problem (White & Epston, 1990). It also paves the way for persons to cooperate with each other and to unite against the problem, therefore decreasing unproductive conflict. This technique is also a clever way to help people “locate facts about their lives and relationships” (White & Epston, 1990, p. 39), which can be especially applicable in Jewish intercultural situations. A couple may come into therapy with a sense of enmity towards one another because of conflicts that are based on their cultures and families. For example, one couple was struggling with pressures from both of their families about what to include in their wedding ceremony. By enabling the couple to see it as an “intercultural problem” common to couples like theirs, they were able to unite better against the problem, rather than be accusatory and frustrated with each other.

The extreme hopefulness of narrative therapy and belief in people can have a great effect on the clients. Families can tend to feel like failures and become overcome by their problems. By highlighting points of success rather than failure, families can gain a new perspective on their lives. As Nichols and Schwartz (2001) write, “The tenacious confidence in people that narrative therapists convey with genuine respect and caring is contagious. As clients come to trust the therapist, they can borrow that confidence and use it in dealing with their problems” (p. 399). This can be especially effective in dealing with Jewish intercultural families that can feel overwhelmed by their issues. In narrative therapy they can be encouraged to focus on their points of success in navigating their intercultural situation and to externalize their intercultural differences as a problem they are overcoming together as they create a new narrative for their relationship. A new narrative for their relationship could be that of a family that is finding common ground,

understanding and connection as they navigate and discover the differences inherent to their intercultural situation.

Solution-Focused Therapy

Solution-focused therapy was developed during the 1970s and 80s by Steve de Shazer, Insoo Kim Berg and their colleagues at the Brief Family Therapy Center in Milwaukee. It is most easily characterized as a minimalist, pragmatic and outcome-oriented psychotherapy:

“The aim of therapy is simply to resolve the presenting complaint as quickly and efficiently as possible so that clients can get on with life. Goals such as promoting personal growth, working through underlying emotional issues, or teaching couples better problem-solving and communication skills are not emphasized” (Gurman, 2002, p.336).

Solution-focused therapy seeks to work in a positive way with people and therefore does not find pathologizing useful (Walter & Peller, 1992).

De Shazer tells the story of the therapy method starting almost by mistake when a family came in and described so many different problems that it was impossible to isolate a clearly defined problem and thus design an intervention, so he helplessly asked the family to pay attention to the positive things in their lives that they wanted to continue to happen, rather than the problems. He was amazed at the result in the family. This began a conviction that it was better to be solution-focused in therapy than problem-focused (Gurman, 2002).

Many solution-focused therapists actually see conventional therapists as potentially harming their clients by focusing too much on problems and discouraging

clients by uncovering layers of problems. Solution-focused therapy stresses a client's capacity to change, and the therapist's job is to simply bring to the client's attention their own ability to change by helping them alter their presuppositions about themselves and their situation. Solution-focused therapy sees tremendous effect occurring through validation and encouragement. A primary method is to look for exceptions, or those times when the problems are not occurring. Then the therapist helps clients examine those exception times to find and see solutions to their problems. They try to help clients see their strengths and resilience and to enable clients to discover their own solutions.

The therapy involves setting very practical and achievable goals identified by the clients. It is designed to be brief, even one session. There are not explorations into the nature of problems, but only enough as to help a client feel heard and validated. But at the same time the therapist does not want to delve so much into the problems as to let the client crystallize their thinking (O'Hanlon & Freidman, 1993). Family-of-origin data, gender, and larger societal context are not considered important so they do not enter into the clinical conceptualizations. The client is the expert on their experience so the therapist works collaboratively with the client to help them see their strengths and find solutions. It is not seen as helpful to focus on problems and failures.

In keeping with this idea, solution-focused therapists resist what they see as the problem-saturated climate of psychotherapy, so they would not see diagnosing disorders and dysfunctions as helpful. For them, everyone has the capacity for change, and is in fact changing. They want to keep their dialogue always in the positive, always working to help affect the presuppositions of their clients to believe they have what is necessary to effect progress in their lives.

One of the underlying assumptions is that small adjustments can have a large effect. Much like the concept of leverage in systems thinking, something as simple as helping a person begin to look for positive exceptions to their view of the problem can affect the entire problem.

Solution-focused therapy falls within the school of postmodern therapies. Like narrative therapy, it sees incredible power in language and in the power of narratives people use to describe themselves. Berg and de Shazer (1993) write, "It is the use of words, thoughts, events and feelings that shape the client's reality, perceptions and behaviors... We help the clients reconstruct and reshape their reality in a way they see as helpful" (p. 9). They believe it is not important what reality actually is. In fact, they would think that there are so many perceptions of reality that actual reality is an irrelevant concept. The key is how people perceive their reality and what language they use to describe it. That becomes their reality. So a solution-focused therapist would seek to help a client adjust the narrative they see about their life and fill it with new presuppositions about themselves. Some therapists like the metaphor of "movie-making." The client is both the actor and director and the therapist is facilitating the client to make a new movie of their life (Walter & Peller, 1992).

Applications to Jewish intercultural therapy. Solutions should be the focus of any counseling endeavor. Large improvements can happen very quickly with small changes, and the more reliant those changes are on the client rather than the therapist, the less dependent the client will be on professional help. Having said this, this paper's approach would still see value in probing issues and history, so as not to just put a band-aid on a serious problem. These practices should not be abandoned. However, there are

times when a solution found in just one aspect of Jewish intercultural family struggle can quickly apply to other challenges. Jewish intercultural couples are often “stuck” and lacking hope because they do not see solutions to their differences as possible. Solution-focused therapy emphasizes giving hope to these couples, and helps to discover ways in which they are already finding success. With Jewish intercultural couples, insights into the source of their differences can often leverage change in removing tension and giving hope. Couples can discover successes in working out small issues related to their familial faith and cultural decisions that can immediately apply to the larger issues. For example, a Jewish intercultural family’s success in being able to navigate the December celebration season can quickly increase confidence in working out their other cultural and extended family issues. Brief therapy will not solve all of a family’s issues, but it can easily put them on the path to enabling them to function well as a family.

Solution-focused therapy is particularly appealing in a pastoral context where long-term therapy may not be possible. Focusing on hope and change while helping people create a new narrative for their lives that fits into God’s narrative can be exceptionally helpful. Also, because of a Jewish person’s potential caution in working with a Christian counselor, an approach that sees the positive and seeks solutions as quickly as possible may be preferable.

As with narrative therapy, incorporating the solution-focused use of constructing new narratives can be an important part of therapy. The emphasis on hope in solution-focused therapy is also effective. Any biblical approach to counseling must contain the pre-supposition that God is able to work and desires change (Kollar, 1997).

Integrating narrative and solution-focused therapies with Christian theology.

There is an aspect of narrative and solution-focused therapies' theoretical framework, which may require some caution from a Christian theological standpoint. Narrative and solution-focused therapies do not accept any reality beyond what an individual constructs. While understanding that events are located in the narratives we create for them, Christian theology does not accept that there is no reality apart from those created narratives. For example, one Holocaust survivor interpreted a Jewish star placed in a circle on a T-shirt as a reference to the Holocaust, and became convinced of an intention to do him harm. He located his understanding of the interaction within a narrative he created that was based on his personal history. But his assumption was mistaken about the intention in wearing the star. In reality, the Jewish star was placed in a circle on that shirt for artistic purposes in complete ignorance of the way that symbol was used by the Nazis. This is a particularly important point in counseling from a Christian perspective. Christians locate the events of their lives both in the narratives they create but also within the larger biblical narratives that have been revealed by God. A Christian counselor helps individuals locate their lives in God's narratives.

So while the foundational relativism of the theory behind narrative and solution-focused therapy cannot be accepted as a Christian, the methodology of helping to create new narratives for how families and individuals understand their lives is really at the heart of a Christian approach to counseling. Becoming a believer in Jesus is discovering a new way to view reality and an individual's place in it. For example, suffering is no longer hopeless, but rather it carries a redemptive purpose within a biblical narrative. People do believe lies about themselves and need to construct new narratives about

themselves that reflect and are consistent with the truth of Scripture. In a popular Christian book, *The Bondage Breaker* (2000), Anderson (perhaps without recognizing it) essentially uses narrative therapy techniques to help individuals gain victory in life. He encourages his readers to see who they are as children of God and the victory they have over the devil and the world. By believing this new narrative of being a child of God they are able to gain victory over their struggles and problems.

Cognitive Behavioral Therapy

In each of the theories to be integrated there are both helpful applications and also aspects of concern. The way of thinking that will guide the actual application of these three theories will be basically a cognitive behavioral approach. In many ways cognitive behavioral therapy began as a way to integrate many diverse approaches (Lynn, 1985). As the name suggests, it is essentially a combination of cognitive and behavioral therapies.

Cognitive therapy in general suggests the importance of modifying faulty patterns of thinking, and the underlying premises, assumptions and attitudes that are contributing (Lynn, 1985). For the cognitive therapist, faulty patterns of thinking lead to dysfunctional emotions, behaviors, and relationships.

Behavioral therapies emerge primarily out of learning theory. The basic idea is that behaviors are largely conditioned responses which result from learned expectations and contingencies (rewards and punishments). That is, for example, a behaviorist might ask, what are the current environmental contingencies that are leading to the undesired behaviors? The key question then emerges, how can the behaviors be modified and unlearned? How best can new behaviors be conditioned?

A cognitive behavioral approach integrates these two ideas. Firstly, it is important to change the way people are thinking in order to indirectly change their behavior, but it is also important to work directly to modify behavior. This is because behaviors can often become conditioned based on various contingencies and, like a habit, cannot simply be changed by an adjustment in the way a person is thinking. Therefore, it is important to address both the way a person is thinking as well as their behavior in order to achieve the best possible outcome.

When integrating solution-focused, narrative and systems therapies, the essence of the approach will be to both change the way people are thinking, and also to work directly to change specific patterns of behavior. Only certain aspects of each therapy will be integrated. A number of elements are common among these multiple therapies and the shared elements are combined to achieve a cohesive approach. Both narrative and solution-focused therapies emphasize the importance of working in a hopeful and collaborative way with the clients to re-story an understanding of their life. In systems and solution-focused therapy there is an emphasis on the idea of leverage, that small changes can have a large effect on family relationships. For narrative and systems therapies, each see the importance of understanding the larger cultural and family histories, which may be presently impacting the clients.

Where the various therapies differ and even conflict, only certain aspects of each therapy can be emphasized rather than the therapy as a whole. The resulting integrated therapy will be brief by design therefore the family system assessment will not be as comprehensive as might usually be seen in systems therapy. Rather the focus will be on working collaboratively with the couple to gain insights into their relationship, by

probing their specifically religious and cultural family histories. These insights will then be used to help the family form new narratives about their relationships. The goal is then to find small successes in looking at new narratives about their relationship and leveraging them into a new and more optimistic understanding of their marital differences.

Various Techniques

There are a number of techniques that have been developed for improving marriages that can be very valuable in Jewish intercultural counseling. In Jewish intercultural couples, while the differences may have cultural components, often the cultural components may simply serve to amplify other more common marital issues. In general, families are encouraged to continue in therapy when they see immediate improvement (Miller, Duncan & Hubble, 2000) therefore it is helpful to use techniques that may be able to quickly implement some behavioral change.

A common issue in Jewish intercultural couples is dealing with conflict. While all couples struggle with conflict, Jewish intercultural couples can be seen as even more predisposed to it than others. It has frequently been joked, “Where there are two Jews, there are three opinions.” While it is dangerous to generalize about a culture, it is helpful to recognize that holding strong opinions and being able to speak about them is a part of American Jewish culture (Smith, 2010). If a couple is struggling with escalating conflict, a speaker/listener technique can be very effective (Markham, 1994). As part of the techniques related to the cognitive behavioral approach to marriage counseling, called The Prevention & Relationship Enhancement Program (*PREP*), it is important to emphasize developing skills in problem solving as a couple. John Gottman’s (1994)

analysis of the destructive and damaging ways that couples engage in conflict is also effective. He urges couples to refrain from criticism, contempt and defensiveness.

Markham and Stanley (1994) are helpful in their full discussion of how hidden (unspoken or unrealized) issues affect conflict. Practical conflict resolution skills are extremely important when dealing with Jewish intercultural couples because of some of the differences between Jewish and Christian culture in dealing with conflict.

In keeping with a solution-focused approach the need to work initially in any marriage conflict situation to help each member of the couple feel more loved can have a substantial immediate effect (Harley, 1996). As part of this approach some exploration to find what each member would need to feel more loved and cared for can provide practical behaviors for a couple to perform for each other, while deeper issues in the marriage are dealt with. Gary Chapman's *The Five Love Languages* (1995) is very helpful in this area. Chapman stresses a couple's need to discover the different actions (language) that make each person feel "loved." Regularly implementing behaviors that make each other feel "loved" can solidify a couple's sense of commitment, renew their passion and help to minimize some of the negative feelings they may have towards one another. Along these same lines it can be helpful to encourage a couple to find ways to spark their friendship by trying to find things to do together, have fun, and avoid letting problems and conflicts invade every aspect of their lives (Stanley, 2002).

Jewish Intercultural Specific

All couples and families will have to find ways to navigate decisions they need to make about how they are going to live as a family (e.g., where they are going to live, how they are going to spend money, how many kids do they want to have, etc.). When

couples come from very different families of origin, these decisions can become more difficult. For Jewish intercultural families, there are certain sets of questions that frequently come up and often cause conflict. And when options are limited and unappealing, couples can feel discouraged. Does one spouse convert to the other's religion? Then whoever makes that sacrifice may feel resentful, or just out of place. Do children just attend services with one of the parents? Is the best option to avoid conflict to simply have no involvement in religious activities? This is often dissatisfying as well, because the couple often wants their children to experience aspects of their tradition and upbringing. Many in the Jewish community would argue that choosing to keep the traditions of both parents will functionally result in a family eventually keeping neither tradition (Friedland & Case, 2001).

The approach of this paper is to help families expand their way of thinking about the issues and create a broader range of options (Eaton, 1994). The author has found it helpful for a couple to expand their options for their family religious and culture decisions in five different areas: identity, community, faith, traditions, and extended family. By answering these questions, a family may be able to find more satisfying and helpful options for their family. Each of these areas will be discussed.

Identity	How do we want our child to think of him or herself?
Community	What religious community, if any, will we be a part of?
Faith	What do we believe and how will we practice that with our family?

Traditions	What traditions will we practice in our home?
Extended Family	How will we relate to our extended families?

Figure 1. Decision Grid for Jewish Intercultural Families.

Identity. Identity is a mysterious concept. Why do people think of themselves the way they do, what does identity mean and what are the implications? Erikson (1963) would call identity one of the central human quests, he wrote, “(a) sense of identity provides the ability to experience one’s self as something that has continuity and sameness, and to act accordingly” (p. 42). People need to think of themselves in a certain way and understand who they are. This is a particularly difficult concept when it comes to being Jewish. Jewish identity is not cleanly tied to a religion or simply to an ethnicity (McGoldrick, 1996). If a wife converts to Judaism so the family can have the same religion, does she now think of herself as Jewish? Does she think of herself as Jewish in the same way her husband does? A Jewish person thinks of him or herself as Jewish regardless of their religious practice. Jewish people may be atheists (Dershowitz, 1997), or even practice Buddhism (Boorstein, 1998), yet understand themselves as Jewish. Still it is not simply an ethnicity either, as Judaism is the religion and practice of the Jewish people.

A couple needs to grapple with the question of their children’s self-identity. Would they hope their children, when asked, would say, “I am Jewish” or “I am half-Jewish” or “I am Korean” or “Jewish on my dad’s side” or “Christian” or “Jewish Christian” etc.? Parents cannot control how their children will eventually think of

themselves, but they need to have a conversation to talk practically about how they will raise their children. Perhaps the most important aspect of that conversation will be to simply gain an understanding of each other's thoughts and feelings about their own identities and aspirations for their children's. The author's Jewish father married a Gentile Mormon, yet insisted the children be raised Jewish in the Synagogue. He was willing to be married to a non-Jew, fully aware that Jewish law would not consider the children Jewish unless the mother was Jewish, yet he could not imagine having children that were not raised Jewish. It was simply not something he saw as an option. Another Jewish client wanted to raise her daughter in her husband's Christian faith because she was so impressed with her husband's loving family and how their faith impacted their lives, yet she wept at the thought of her daughter not thinking of herself as Jewish and thus being different from her Jewish mother.

Identity is particularly fiercely held within the Jewish community. On surveys of Jewish concerns always among the top issues are anti-Semitism and assimilation (Combined Jewish Philanthropies, 1995). The history of the Jewish people is filled with persecution. Most Jewish families in the United States either immigrated as a result of the pogroms of Eastern Europe and Russia, or the Holocaust. Jewish people are proudly an historical anomaly in being a people, at times without a land and without even a common language (because conversational Hebrew was developed relatively recently). They did not and still do not assimilate into the cultures of the nations where they live. Jewish people remain as a distinct people group even though they have existed within many different nations and cultures over the past 2,000 years. The fear of assimilation within the Jewish community is that if they assimilate into a culture, they will slowly

cease to exist as a distinct people. In a conversation with the author, a member of the Jewish Community called assimilation, “the quiet holocaust,” in that assimilation results in the destruction of the Jewish people. This is one of the reasons for a resistance to intermarrying with the Jewish community, because of fear that intermarrying will lead to assimilation.

Individual Jewish people are often confused about their own identity, feeling in one sense both consciously and unconsciously that their Jewishness is what makes them unique and distinct within a Christian nation, yet confused as to what it means when they do not choose to be involved with the Jewish community or religion. This is a pressure Jewish intercultural families may feel acutely, especially since in the eyes of many within the Jewish community, a Jewish person has committed a taboo by marrying a non-Jew. The identity pressure can come from both the Jewish partner and their family, but also from the non-Jewish partner who is often confused as to the nature and intensity of Jewish identity.

It is important for a counselor to help Jewish intercultural couples explore these issues of identity. Similar concerns of identity may also exist in the non-Jewish family to some extent as well. As mentioned earlier, Christian denominations can have varying degrees of cultural and communal identity.

Community. Every family must make a choice as to what religious community, if any, they will want to be a part of. Generally, if one member of the couple converts to the religion of the other, they are making the decision about what religious community they are going to be a part of as a family. But if there is not a conversion, this question becomes a difficult one. There are many options. A family could decide that they will

not belong to any religious community, or they may decide to loosely expose their children to small parts of both of their communities. If the couple decides to be involved with a religious community, they will need to decide the involvement of the non-adherent member of the family. For example, will the Jewish father still attend church or church events (like a meal or if the kids are in a play) with the family, or will he simply stay at home as the mother takes the children to church, or how will a non-Jewish mother be involved in the synagogue? Will their involvement need to be limited because of their differences?

Faith. As indicated previously, being involved in a religious community and/or identifying oneself with a particular religion does not necessarily imply what one actually believes. Religions can take on more of a communal identity. This is especially true in the Jewish world. It is fully acceptable to be Jewish and to be an atheist. One Jewish atheist, when asked why he said the “*shema*” each morning (“Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one. And Thou shalt love the LORD thy God...,” Deut 6:4-8, JPS) and practiced as an Orthodox Jew, he said he considered the *shema* like a pledge of allegiance to the Jewish people (Smith, 2010).

One evangelical Christian woman couldn’t understand how her boyfriend’s family could care so much about her converting to Judaism if they didn’t really care about God or the beliefs of Judaism. She needed to understand that his family wanted her to “become” Jewish, and to raise their children as Jews, part of an ethnic community, not to “believe” something. By contrast, the woman wanted her Jewish boyfriend to believe in Jesus, and be a Christian by faith, but not become a Gentile. She wanted to share her faith with her boyfriend because for her, her faith was at the core of how she experienced

reality and lived out her life. She wanted to be able to pray with her boyfriend, and have them worship together, not just so they were in the same physical space, but she wanted him to experience the same closeness to God that she did. Far from wanting her boyfriend to leave his Jewish traditions she actually enjoyed them and wanted them for her family. Her concern was that they could share the same “faith” and spiritual practice as a family.

There can be a wide spectrum of beliefs and adherence to “doctrinal” religious beliefs for Jewish people as well as those raised in Christian communities. A couple needs to be encouraged to get beyond what Christianity or Judaism teaches and be honest with one another about what they really believe and how they understand their spirituality (Walsh, 2010). Furthermore, they need to make consequential decisions about how they want to raise their children. How do they want to practice their faith in the home? Will they pray with their children before meals or bed? Will they talk about God at home, or read the Bible?

Traditions. One of easiest first steps for a couple in the process of navigating family cultural and religious decisions is deciding what traditions they are going to keep as a family in their home. For example, will they have a Christmas tree and/or Chanukah menorah? Will they have Santa? What about Easter eggs or Passover? How will the house be decorated at these times? This is actually one of the easiest areas for a couple to negotiate for a couple of reasons. Firstly, the issues are more tangible and physical, unlike issues of identity, for instance. And secondly, what makes this an easy area for the couple to isolate, is that they most likely have been forced to begin making these decisions already, because the holidays have come and gone in their relationship and they

have had to compromise on it already. They may have discovered that they are able to find compromises, which can give them courage as they face the more difficult areas of decision-making. They may also have resentment and frustration over the decisions they have made which may have even sparked some of the intercultural conflict to begin with.

This can be a fruitful exploration in counseling to help them better grasp what was difficult or frustrating. As part of this conversation, a goal would be to help them better understand for themselves and for their partners those aspects of the traditions that are more important to each of them personally, and also those traditions of the other which may be culturally difficult. For example, a Jewish person may actually enjoy a Christmas tree, but find a nativity scene disconcerting. This may seem inconsistent to the Christian partner. But a counselor can help them consider that many Jewish people, who were not raised very religious and never went to synagogue, only faced their Jewishness in December as they were the children who “did not celebrate Christmas” or “believe in Jesus.” Thus the nativity scene, because it includes the person of Jesus, may create emotional difficulties and issues of identity for a Jewish person, while the Christmas tree, which is essentially a beautiful decoration without a necessary religious connotation, actually fills a longing they always had. They may have felt left out not having a Christmas tree, yet have a sense of fear or confusion when seeing a nativity scene.

Counseling can be helpful to the Jewish person to both discover their own conflicted feelings, and give their partner more insight and understanding. Conversely, the Christian partner can consider for themselves and explain to their Jewish partner what the various elements of tradition mean to them and determine their level of personal importance.

One exercise is for the couple to talk specifically about their traditions as children around the December holidays. They can identify those traditions they enjoyed the most and would want for their own children as well as traditions they did not celebrate, but perhaps would want for their children. Finally, the couple could make a “plan” for how they would like, as a family, to celebrate the December holidays. They could then do the same for the Easter/Passover season and other holidays. The process is to help them better discover why certain traditions are meaningful and important to them, and why certain traditions of their spouse may be particularly difficult for them.

Extended family. Regardless of the choices a family makes about how to practice their culture and faith in their home, they still must make decisions about how they will relate to their extended families. There are a number of potential issues. To what extent will the children be involved with their grandparents’ religious practices and traditions? For example, will they go to church or synagogue with them? Will they have a bris or baptism? How will decisions as a family affect the way the children will feel around their cousins? Will one set of grandparents feel like outsiders from the traditions of their children? What about when the extended family feels resentment or chooses to intentionally exclude them from family functions? One Jewish/Catholic couple’s daughter was not allowed to be a flower girl like her cousins at her aunt’s wedding because she was not being raised Catholic.

A couple needs to recognize how the decisions they make will affect their relationship with extended family, and they need to think through how they are going to relate to their extended family and be involved specifically in the religious traditions of their extended family. For example, one writer suggested that if an “interfaith couple”

decided to raise their children Jewish, they should be sure to spend non-religious holidays like the Fourth of July or Thanksgiving with their non-Jewish family (Friedland & Case, 2001). Oftentimes relations to extended family can be strained because of the disapproval of the marriage or differences in communal or child-raising decisions. All the more these decisions on how to relate to extended family are important.

By breaking out the decisions into these five areas, a couple can more easily understand the issues that are at stake and find where their areas of conflict or unidentified hurt may exist. They may find that they are more able to find compromises by discovering what is most important to them. They may also discover that where they thought there were irreconcilable differences, there was a way to compromise.

One reason it is very important to break out the issues of culture and faith from a specifically Christian point of view is for the couple to better see the possibility for a unified faith and belief system. An assumption that makes Christian counseling distinct from non-Christian counseling is its biblical viewpoint. A foundational biblical view of the world finds a universal need and value for each person to come into a personal relationship with Jesus Christ. As written earlier, a particular stumbling block for Jewish people in coming to Jesus is the common belief that in order to do so they must cease being part of the Jewish people. The value in separating faith and culture is for the Jewish person to see they can remain Jewish culturally, which could even extend to synagogue attendance, regardless of what they may believe. This brings the potential for a Jewish/Christian couple to have a unified faith. The couple may not decide to have a unified faith, but the author sees an objective as being able to create as many options as possible for marital harmony. For example, a family may decide to make a church their

religious community, yet celebrate Jewish traditions in their home and have other cultural and religious experiences to help reinforce Jewish identity and connection to a Jewish family (Smith, 2010).

Also distinguishing culture and faith allows each partner to experience the other's faith and culture with fewer stumbling blocks. For example, some Christians may feel uncomfortable in going to a synagogue service or in celebrating Jewish holidays because of their faith in Jesus, but by helping them see they can experience them on a cultural level celebrating need not be a matter of religious conscience.

General Counseling Approach

The general therapeutic approach will involve an extensive assessment and, in keeping with a solution-focused approach, an emphasis on immediate change before exploring the deeper changes through the application of the five category grid for exploring faith and culture decisions. But often, since cultural issues may be at least amplifying marital issues if not the source of them, giving insight into potential cultural differences can be helpful. Framing cultural issues can, at times, be humorous for a couple and help to diffuse tension and create closeness as they think about their respective families. This is part of subtly helping them to create more positive narratives about their differences and become more united against their issues. Part of the longer-term therapy will involve helping the couple to separate the issues of culture and faith. For example, saying, "Let's probe why being Jewish is so important to you when you attend synagogue so infrequently." A focus would be on helping the couple understand how their expectations are different because of their culture and families (Crohn, 1996). Internalized expectations and obligations to one's family of origin can powerfully

influence behavior (Gleckman & Streicher, 1990). In keeping with a systems approach, genograms and extensive religious and cultural histories will be taken. These will both help the counselor gain insight into their issues, and help the couple better understand the religious and cultural identity of the other.

In general the role of a marriage and family counselor is to provide a forum for a couple or family to explore their struggles. The counselor is showing them concern and looking at their lives with them, helping them to see what is going on and organize what they are seeing. It is the couple that needs to discover the solutions and make the decisions as to what they are going to do with their family, because it is the couple that must live with the consequences of their decisions. The counselor offers their experience and skills to help them in this process of discernment. A Christian counselor, too, is able to show an understanding of God's view of a couple's marriage, and invite the Holy Spirit's presence to be a redemptive force, granting wisdom, conviction of sin, healing and restoration. In keeping with the conviction that it is the family itself, with the assistance of the Holy Spirit, that brings about change, and not the counselor, couples will be encouraged to do homework between sessions. And in keeping with the conviction that small adjustments can bring about significant change, the need for tangible, attainable goals will be stressed. However, Christian counselors, while being willing to offer biblical views, are ethically bound not to impose their values on the couple (AACC, 2004).

In keeping with a solution-focused approach, an emphasis will be placed on giving hope. And, because of this hope, encouragement to be resilient in the face of difficulty can be encouraged. The counselor is always seeking to give a sense of positive

regard and affirmation. This is a deeply Christian approach, for Jesus does not treat us as our sins deserve but rather loves us and works to transform us into the people we were created to be. The Christian counselor is working with Jesus to restore marriages into the one-flesh images of God they were intended to be (Gen 2:24, Ps 103:10, 2 Cor 3:18).

An assessment will be made as to how much of a couple's difficulties are related to their intercultural/interfaith situation, and then insights will be sought that will help give them understanding about the nature of their differences and expectations. Then a decision will be made to what extent the family can use the five-category decision grid to help them through making practical decisions about the life of their family.

In keeping with solution-focused and narrative therapies, the therapy will be positive, hopeful and collaborative. While trying to minimize a problem-saturated narrative, a systems approach will be used to help identify sources of system conflict and bring understanding by probing religious and cultural family history and dynamics. This will aid in a couple's ability to produce new narratives about their problems that will include more insight and understanding about their problems and practical behavioral solutions.

CHAPTER 2

THEOLOGICAL BASIS FOR COUNSELING

In building a theological basis for counseling a biblical anthropology will first be presented, followed by a theological understanding of marriage then family, and then close with a theological understanding of the practice of counseling. As part of the final section Jewish intercultural families will be specifically discussed.

Biblical Anthropology

The foundation of a biblical anthropology lies in Genesis chapters one through three. Humanity was created in the image of God (1:28) and made to be in communion with God and with access to God (3:8), but because of sin, humanity became separated from God (3:23). This simple formulation provides a number of implications for the nature of humanity.

Firstly, by being created to be in communion with God, but being presently separated from God, there exists in all people a desire for God. As Augustine wrote, “[You have made us for yourself, and] our heart is restless until it rests in you” (O’Donnell, 2005, p. 6). So within the unconscious of all individuals is the desire to experience the transcendent, or simply to connect to God. Humanity was created in communion with God, and is ever seeking in its unconscious for a restoration of that communion. That communion with God also exists outside of time—it is eternal in its nature, as Jesus said in John 17:3: “This is eternal life, that they might know you, the one true God and Jesus Christ whom you have sent” (NIV). In its essence, eternal life is knowing God. That relationship with God transcends earthly death. It is not surprising then in Genesis 3, that when the man and woman sinned and lost fellowship with God,

thereby experiencing spiritual death, it was accompanied by a removal from Eden (with access to the tree of life) and the entry of physical death. Therefore, in each individual's unconscious exists a personal transcendence that longs for communion with God, and a sense of the eternal nature of life as Ecclesiastes 3:11 says "(God) has set eternity in the hearts of men" (NIV).

Secondly, as fulfillment model theorists like Rogers and Maslow stressed, humans also seem to have within them the striving and desire "to become," or to be "self actualized," or "reach fulfillment" as it is variously worded (Maddi, 2001).

Theologically speaking, this is rooted in the idea that humanity, made in the image of God, was given a purpose to rule or steward the earth (Gen 1). There is a sense in all humans to seek to fulfill that calling; fully using the unique gifts and abilities God has given them. Part of this image of God can also be seen in the inherent morality of humanity. All people have a sense of right and wrong (Rom 2)—"right" in this sense, being those things which are in the image and purpose of God, and "wrong" being those things which deviate from the image or purpose of God. So within each person is a sense of what the world should be but is not, due to the Fall. But the image of God is more than simple morality; it is a sense of a fullness of humanity, a sense in each person of what they should be and desire to become. So this image of God within humanity is both a striving forward, but also an echo from deep within the history of humanity that comes from the experience the first humans who saw life as it was intended to be.

A third theological element that is critical to personality development is the Fall. The world is broken and is not functioning properly. There is an echo of a world, which is not the world that presently exists. A feeling exists that there should be peace, but

there is little peace. A feeling that there should be no crime, yet crime exists. There is a sense that people should not have to suffer and die, but still individuals are surrounded by suffering and death. This brings a great deal of despair and confusion. This despair is the same that is found at the foundation of existential thinking (Corsini, 2005). Life appears to be without hope, yet inside there is both the desire for hope and the thought that it should exist.

One way an individual encounters the brokenness or fallenness of the world is in his personal sinful nature. As both Freud and Jung observed, there is conflict in every individual (Maddi, 2001). Individuals are not in harmony with the world around them, both because the world is not right, but also because they themselves have desires that are not good for themselves or others. Jung and Freud would essentially see the internal conflict as being between the desires of the individual and the restrictions of society (Maddi, 2001). Biblically, this conflict can be seen as being within the individual himself. As the Apostle Paul said, “For what I do is not the good I want to do; no, the evil I do not want to do—this I keep on doing” (Rom 7:19 NIV). Individuals are in conflict with themselves and also in conflict with the world.

Another key effect of the Fall in terms of personality development is in the sin that is done against an individual. Part of being created in the image of God is having a way in which we are naturally supposed to mature, grow and develop. For example, trust and security are largely formed from the environment and relationship provided by the parents—a child’s first significant relationships. If a mother is abusive rather than nurturing, this impacts the development of the child. And so people are injured in their personhood by being sinned against. This could evidence itself, for example, in

childhood in an adverse effect on their development, or in adulthood hurting their ability to fully function as they were intended to.

Due to the effect of the Fall on the world, an individual will experience varying levels of fear, shame, pain, inadequacy, mistrust, defensiveness, frustration, and other broken affects. Much of an individual's development happens in response to these experiences, and as the individual seeks to resolve these conflicts in their conscious life.

God has given people the ability to make choices. Because of the Fall, humanity will often desire to make choices that are against God's will and thus harmful to themselves. Yet, throughout the Bible all are exhorted to choose to do what is right (Ex. 20:1-17, Is. 1:15-17, Mt. 5:38-48 etc.). So an individual's desire may be present to do wrong because of their *sin nature* from the Fall, or as a result of having been sinned against by others, yet still they have a volitional opportunity to make good choices about their actions. They in turn will experience the consequences of their decisions for good or ill.

An important theological point here as well is the message of the cross. God's act of redemption through Jesus has been placed within our consciousness by God. Even Carl Jung (1963) who denied Jesus' death and resurrection believed Jesus was the ultimate archetype, and he saw evidences of his story across many cultures. I believe he saw those evidences because the story of the narrative of Jesus' giving of his life is the metanarrative, or great story, of all people. By being willing to come to Jesus, there is a pathway to restoration of the image of God within the individual.

But a refusal to come back to God and be in fellowship with him, as humanity was created to be, will lead to further dehumanizing or destruction of the image of God.

This happens not only by neglecting the path of redemption in Jesus, but also by choosing against the moral echoes of the image of God within. For instance, when people murder or lie, they are being shaped away from the image of God. In C.S. Lewis' (1943) classic *Perelandra*, one of the characters begins being called the “unhuman” because he essentially gives himself over to the path of evil and has lost his humanity. That is why the echo of heaven in every person can actually haunt an individual, rather than give them joy and hope. That echo becomes an “expectation of judgment” (Heb 10:27).

In conclusion, with regard to a biblical anthropology, humanity is created in the image of God to be in communion with God. But the development from birth to becoming the ultimate fulfillment of their unique image of God is greatly affected by the Fall, which shapes them genetically—in their fallen nature, and also in the way they are molded by the broken world. Their development is also affected by the volitional choices they make to ultimately be formed into the image of God or to become dehumanized, or unbecome the image of God. Yet despite humanity's fallen condition there still exists in every individual a desire to be in communion with God, and a sense of what humanity was meant to be (Lewis, 2001).

Marriage

The significance of marriage in God's economy is evident by its placement as a main subject in each of the first three chapters of Scripture. Genesis 1 shows male and female as being part of the nature of creation, together ruling over it. Then the institution of marriage is described in Genesis 2, and the rupture of marriage is described in Genesis 3.

Indeed it could be argued that the marriage relationship is humanity's primary state of being. One may protest that marriage cannot be the primary state of being because then it does not include single people, but that is not the case. All people are part of a one-flesh unit. A child born into a marriage is literally bone of their parents' bone and flesh of their flesh. All children are part of the one-flesh marriage unit. It is not until a child gets married that they "leave" this one-flesh unit to then "cleave" to their spouse to form another one-flesh unit (Gen 2:24), from which other children would form. Thus there are no truly independent individuals; all people are actually connected to others in communities of one flesh. It should not come then as a surprise that the one-flesh marriage unit reflects both the communal trinitarian image of God (Propst, 2003), as well as the communal one body that is Christ and the Church (Eph 5:31-32). If marriage is the primary state of being, it should not come as a surprise that the Fall's initial effect is depicted as a breach of the marriage relationship. Perhaps it is easier to think of the one-flesh unit established by marriage as simply "family" and the theological basis of family. Both the Fall's initial consequence on marriage and a theology of family will be discussed more fully later on.

God instituted marriage in Genesis 2 when the male and female whom he created were joined together to become one flesh. While the man was created from the dust and all other things were created apparently ex-nihilo, the woman was created out of the rib, or side, of the man. This was done to exhibit the nature of the one-flesh marriage. Two people literally become one. They are a part of one another's body. That is why Paul says that a man is to care for his wife as he would his own body (Eph 5:28). Thus each person's needs, worries, cares and responsibilities also become those of their spouse.

This is the foundational commitment of marriage. The nature of this commitment can be seen most clearly when a baby comes into the marriage. Each parent instinctively realizes the baby's needs are the same as if it was his or her own need, and they care for the baby as they would care for themselves. This is the same sort of mutual connection that ideally exists between spouses. This commitment to one another then becomes the foundation of trust and security for each individual. Implications for the act of sex exists as well, in that it is an act in which two people are literally joined as one flesh. Sex reenacts the underlying reality that the two people are now one, which is why it is commonly seen as the sign of the marriage covenant, and why the continuing priority of sex in marriage can be understood in terms of continually renewing the marriage covenant. Sex's power and priority can be testified to in that it is the method by which man and woman, in the image of God, joined together as one, now (pro-) create another person.

Genesis 3 describes the break of trust between God and the man and woman. The result of disobeying God in the Fall is pronounced in consequences for the marriage relationship. Rather than a united one-flesh marriage of equality, the man is a ruler, and the woman's desire is for him (Gen 3:16). While the meaning of this verse may be difficult to understand, the parallel Hebrew construction in Genesis 4:7 where God warns Cain about sin ("[Sin] desires to have you, but you must master it" (NIV) makes the meaning clearer. The parallel structure of Genesis 3:16 and 4:7 seems to imply that the battle within marriage is akin to the battle with sin in general. In the same way, individuals battle with sin to keep from being overcome by it. The husband and wife

now have a relationship of enmity and battling for rulership, rather than the peace, trust, and commitment of actually being united as one.

The parallel of marriage with God's relationship with humanity (as seen in Christ and the Church, and Israel with God) can also be seen here in that the breaking of humanity's relationship with God resulted in a break in the marriage relationship. For the man was blaming the woman, even before the curses were pronounced, as a result of disobeying God (Gen 3:12).

It is critical to also see that God's overall plan to restore the world through the redeeming work of Jesus Christ, includes a specific work to restore marriages. In the same way, God is reconciling humanity to himself, making peace, so this now enables peace within the marriage couple and a return to unity. Although, while still in this fallen world, full restoration will not occur, restoration can be attempted in the power of the Holy Spirit.

The implication for marriage counseling from these biblical principles is that the couple needs to view their marriage in one-flesh terms. They have made a commitment that they are no longer two, but one in essence, thus all needs, desires, pains and responsibilities are shared. There are many different approaches to strengthening the foundation of a good marriage. Some would say it is communication and in particular an ability to deal with and resolve conflicts (Markham, 1994). Others would say the key is to cultivate friendship (Gottman, 1994) and discover ways to help each other feel loved (Chapman, 1995). While communication and friendship are critical to marriage, they are not the foundation to a good marriage. I believe the key foundation of marriage is commitment. Commitment is not only a theological biblical foundation for marriage, but

also manifests itself functionally as well. It is a commitment to the actual marriage itself that maintains the strength and stability of a marriage. When distancing or difficulty come into a marriage, it will likely not be compatibility, friendship or communication that maintain the marriage, but rather the commitment to the marriage that each individual has, be it consciously or subconsciously. This commitment then becomes the source of the trust, security and wholeness, which individuals long for and that will ultimately lead to a satisfying and strong marriage. As Dietrich Bonhoeffer wrote to his niece on her wedding day, “It is not your love that sustains the marriage, but from now on, the marriage that sustains your love” (Metaxas, 2010, p. 458).

Commitment in no way minimizes the value of communication skills or friendship in a marriage, but these build upon a foundation of commitment. They do not replace it in importance or necessity. Emotions and feelings follow will and actions. For example, the love for one’s children is not dependent on momentary emotions or feelings for them but rather on the commitment to these children. Then because of the commitment to them, feelings and affections towards them will result (Volf, 2006). One woman in counseling said, when debating whether to stay married, “But I don’t have those feelings I had before for him...I can’t be with someone I don’t love.” Miroslav Volf (2006) would argue that it is the decision to give to someone that actually creates preciousness (love) in the heart. He uses the example of when he and his wife adopted two children. He said that even though they knew these children were no more precious than any other children in the world, yet because they chose to uniquely give to these children by adopting them, they became more precious to him and his wife than any other children in the world. The same is true in marriage. In marriage, one chooses to

uniquely give to one person, vowing to cherish them and love that one person above all the people in the world. In giving to that one person, the emotions and love may then follow. This is a deeper and lasting love, different from the feelings of immediate affection and infatuation that may be thought of as love. But because of the Fall, this commitment to marriage may not be present, and there will often exist some level of enmity within any marriage. Part of the purposes of marriage counseling is to work to minimize that enmity, and restore commitment and trust.

Also implied in one-flesh is the permanence of marriage. An individual cannot un-become the product of two people, so divorce, or the severing of the one-flesh marriage is not possible. However, because of the Fall, one-flesh marriages can be severed in cases such as following adultery, or abandonment, or abuse (Heth, 2002). In these cases divorce is allowable because it is not actually severing the marriage, but rather confirming that the marriage covenant is already broken (Mt 19:3-8).

Family

The idea of a family, as noted previously, is based in a single, one-flesh marriage. Children are extensions of the one-flesh marriage. Then those children leave those initial one-flesh units to form others, thus extending the family beyond a single nuclear family. Israel was organized according to large families and then into tribes, which were greatly extended families. The Scripture then extends this familial language to the people of God and the Church. Throughout the Old and New Testaments fellow believers refer to each other as “brother” (Ps 133:1, Phlm 20, Heb 13:23) and to all the believers together as the “family of God” (Gal 6:10, 1Pet 4:17). By doing this the Scripture seems to accept the nature of commitment within a family as self-evident, and then by analogy teaches

believers that within the Church they are to live with that same form of familial commitment.

The importance of the family unit and the relationships within the family unit appear to be accepted and encouraged within the Scriptures. For example, the commandment to honor one's father and mother (Ex 20:12) is reiterated in the New Testament (Eph 6:2). Parents are told "do not exasperate your children; instead, bring them up in the training and instruction of the Lord" (Eph 6:4 NIV). The exhortation to care for the widows in their extended families (Deut 25:5, 1Tim 5:4) implies a level of responsibility within families. Paul specifically tells the church that it is only to provide financially for those widows who are truly in need, "But if a widow has children or grandchildren, these should learn first of all to put their religion into practice by caring for their own family and so repaying their parents and grandparents, for this is pleasing to God" (1Tim 5:4 NIV).

An important passage that informs this discussion is Mark 12:25 where Jesus apparently says that marriage does not exist when we are resurrected. From this one can infer that while we have connections here in the present on earth in our families, these connections may not be eternal in nature. This idea is supported by Jesus prioritizing an individual's affiliation to God and to the followers of God over their familial relations (Mk 3:32-35, Lk 14:26).

A note perhaps should be made in regard to the household codes found in the New Testament that would apparently create a patriarchal order for the family (Col 3:17-22, Eph 5:21-6:9) and justify slavery. Although many have taken these codes at face value, it can be argued that this is not a correct interpretation of these codes. The Apostle

Paul was not creating household mandates, but rather using and adjusting existing household codes. By using the household codes Paul is accepting the necessity of order in the large and extended home relationships as it is exercised in the codes of the day (Moo, 2008). One can imagine that the gospel, with its radical implications of equality for slaves and women, may have been guilty of the accusation of being a message of social upheaval (Moo, 2008). By maintaining the household codes, Paul is able to maintain the gospel emphasis on forgiveness and reconciliation with God and avoid being termed a revolutionary, an accusation that had been lodged at both Paul (Acts 17:7) and Jesus (Mt 22:17). Yet, even so, Paul does not simply repeat the known proscriptions, he adds to them, intentionally adding standards for the husband, where normally they would only contain standards for the wife (Moo, 2008). Paul does the same with the relationship of slave and master, adding regulations for the master. Previously it was accepted that there were codes of conduct for slaves and women, but not for men and masters. Paul also is careful to add that all are to remember that, before God, they are the same. So while they may have different roles and levels of social standing here on earth, they will all answer to God, and with all they do they are serving God and not man (Col 3:22-25). So ironically, what might be considered texts that encourage a patriarchal organization of the family, if understood properly, may actually be a beginning of the deconstruction of the patriarchal codes of the day (Barton, 1996).

Biblical Behavioral Admonitions

The Scriptures also contain a number of very simple and practical principles that lend themselves well to marriage and family counseling. Individuals are called to love their neighbor as themselves. The closest neighbor is one's spouse. Love in the Bible is

a laid down life (1Jn 3:16). Sacrifice and the willingness to lay down one's rights in love is the call of God for any married couple. Individuals are exhorted to serve one another, and consider other's needs as more important than their own (Phil 2:1-5).

In all relationships we are called to exhibit the fruit of the spirit (Gal 5:22) and be kind, compassionate, slow to anger, patient, and gentle. Exhortations like these are given in relational contexts so that the action is always done to another. When we are called to be compassionate or kind, the implication is that we are to be compassionate or kind towards another person. This is made more explicit in commands to love one another, or serve one another. Thus, many biblical commands and exhortations for character and action can find natural application within marriages and families.

It is true that these general biblical character and behavioral commands are already encompassed within the framework of a one-flesh marriage in that a one-flesh marriage implies a need to love one another, be kind, and compassionate. However, in the actual practice of counseling, the concept of one-flesh marriage may be a bit hard to grasp especially if the couple is in distress, while the relatively simple, straight-forward admonitions to behavior may be easier to apply directly to marriage.

Jewish Intercultural Families

Dealing with Jewish intercultural couples presents a number of theological questions in terms of approach from a Christian counseling point of view. A Christian believes in the importance of faith in Jesus and in the value of the Holy Spirit's ability to work to create marital health and unity for the couple. If this is the case, how does the counselor theologically approach counseling a couple that is not receptive to hearing about Jesus? How does that counselor deal with a Jewish person who may be specifically

hostile to hearing about Jesus? What if the couple is “unequally yoked” in that one of them is a follower of Jesus and the other (most commonly the Jewish one) is not? What is the correct approach to their marriage? Or what is the approach of the counselor if that couple is considering marriage? These are questions, which every Christian counselor must ask, but because they are intrinsic to the approach of this thesis, it is important that they be dealt with explicitly. The questions will be handled in the order in which they were presented above.

Perhaps the best way to approach these questions is to think in terms of theological principles a Christian counselor will draw on when considering these issues.

1. God created marriage and family to be enjoyed by all people. It is part of God’s general revelation and operates apart from any specific faith or obedience to God. All individuals are birthed from two parents, thus marriage is God’s created order. All individuals, made in the image of God, may be harmed by bad marriages and unhealthy conflict within a family. Therefore, the counselor should always work for the strengthening and stability of any marriage or family, regardless of the personal faith of the individuals involved.
2. A counselor views every individual with respect and views them as precious, because all people are loved by God and made in God’s image. Yet, because of the Fall, it is reasonable to expect that every individual is broken. As Dan Allender (1990) says, both “dignity and depravity” exists in every individual (p. 37). Therefore, regardless of a person’s faith, we work to bless them because they are important to God. Counselors can offer them positive regard yet at the same time can expect conflict because of sin. Also, because they have the image of

God, they also have a knowledge of the right, and a counselor can draw on what Dennis Hollinger (2009) calls “the wisdom of the unregenerate” (p. 89).

3. It is not a Christian’s responsibility, be it a counselor or even an evangelist, to convert anyone; rather it is to make the gospel available. A counselor can shower a couple with God’s grace, and show them how their faith can affect their marriage (along with other counseling advice as well). But that sharing comes with a freedom that recognizes the response to the gospel is ultimately between God and the couple. Even Jesus healed ten lepers and saw only one come back to give glory to God (Lk 17:11-19). The Christian counselor can feel that same freedom to be open about who they are and what they think is best for the marriage, yet need never to push, or coerce, or insist on conversion or pursuit of faith from the couple. This is also important in dealing with children in any family. The parents may be believers in Jesus, but the children may not be.
4. There is a need to adhere to the advertised context of the counseling session. If the couple is coming to a Christian counselor specifically who states explicitly that their counseling is from a biblical worldview, then there is an expectation of a Christian perspective and the potential introduction of Christian beliefs and practices is appropriate. However, if the Christian counselor is not practicing specifically as a *Christian* counselor, then the counselor, while never hiding their perspective or advice, needs to maintain the integrity of the context to which the couple has come. That is, if a couple or family is expecting and paying for secular marriage and family counseling, then that is what they should receive. The Christian counselor may still be administering God’s grace in the midst of a

couple's suffering, but because there is not an explicit expectation of the potential introduction of Christian beliefs and practices, the counselor must be very careful in doing so.

5. In dealing with the Jewish person within an intercultural family it is firstly important that a Christian counselor accepts that the gospel is for Jewish people as well as non-Jewish people (Rom 1:16). Some have taught that Jewish people have a way to God apart from Jesus, which is not a biblical perspective (Rosen, 2002). However, at the same time, a counselor needs to recognize that most Jewish people do not believe in Jesus, and may have even been taught specifically they would be a traitor to their people if they did. Therefore a Christian counselor must work in an especially sensitive fashion, exercising sensitivity in language, working to help the Jewish person feel safe and understood. It is important for the counselor to help the couple recognize the difference between faith and culture so the Jewish person and their non-Jewish partner can understand that to follow Jesus is not a denial of being "Jewish." It is important they understand their decision as a faith decision, and not one of family and culture, although they need to be aware of the ramifications in those areas of their decision.
6. In a situation where a couple is unequally yoked (that is where one member of the couple is a believer in Jesus and one is not), divorce is still never encouraged. However, the believer has not sinned if the unbeliever refuses to live with them (1Cor 7). A counselor in this situation must do their best to help both members of the marriage understand how their different faiths are impacting their marriage, without pressuring the unbeliever. It is important especially in a specifically

“Christian” counseling situation to recognize that there may exist a significant inequity of trust. For example, the Jewish member of the family may not trust or feel confident seeing a Christian counselor. The counselor may have to take special care to show they are balanced, fair and understanding.

In a situation where a believer is married to an unbeliever, it must be recognized that the unbeliever did nothing against their conscience or faith in marrying the believer, but rather it is the believer who may have acted against their faith by marrying a non-believer. They may even surprise their spouse if, after they are married, they now decide to pursue their faith, if they had given their spouse a different expectation. This is not to say that a counselor should advise a believer not to pursue their faith, but a counselor needs to help the couple see all the relational dynamics that may have been created by one of them beginning to actively pursue their faith.

7. If an intercultural couple is not married but is considering marriage, it is the counselor’s responsibility to help the couple to see the impending problems they will be facing and the ramifications with their families and future family as well as the ramifications to their pursuit of faith.

In conclusion, when counseling a Jewish intercultural couple, Christian counselors are to work towards the stability and strength of the relationship. They will work to foster understanding and insight, specifically in regard to faith and cultural issues. Christian counselors are to be honest about their faith and open to discussing it and its value for the couple, believing in the Holy Spirit’s work and the longing in all people for the gospel. Yet at the same time, they must be cognizant of a Jewish person’s

possible cultural and religious struggle with Jesus and recognize every individual's right to reject faith. The counselor must be careful to accept the couple as they choose to be and work to help them as they are.

Christian counselors can share an understanding of God's view of marriage and invite the Holy Spirit's redemptive presence, bringing restoration through healing, giving wisdom, and conviction of sin while always being careful not to impose their values on the couple. It is the couple themselves, with the assistance of the Holy Spirit that brings about change, and not the counselor. Additionally because of a Christian counselor's belief in a living and active God, a key element a Christian counselor should always bring to a session is hope: a hope that God is able to work to heal and redeem any marriage or family difficulty. This hope can enable a counselor to offer a family the encouragement to be resilient in the face of difficulty, and affirm them regardless of who they are because of Jesus' love for humanity and the fact that he does not treat anyone as their sins deserve. And it is this same Jesus, through his Spirit, that desires to restore marriages into the one-flesh images of God they were intended to be.

CHAPTER 3

LITERATURE REVIEW

In considering the literature related to the subject of this thesis, this review will move from the broadest applications then narrow in to the more specific. The review will begin with the foundational thinking of the way ethnic culture impacts the practice of therapy, then progress to the research done on therapy with intercultural couples. The literature related to the Jewish intercultural couples and their children will then be considered. This appraisal of available literature will be concluded by looking at counseling with Jewish intercultural couples from a Christian approach and the ethics related to this type of work.

Counseling and Culture

Although culture has long been considered a factor in counseling, recognition of the need for culturally sensitive counselors is fairly recent (Sullivan, 2006). Monica McGoldrick was an early pioneer on the influence of culture and ethnicity in counseling in the 1970s. She edited the book *Ethnicity and Family Therapy* (1982), now in its third edition. Her main focus centers on helping counselors learn to counsel more effectively when working cross-culturally. She has encouraged counselors to be aware of their own culture, and to learn more about other cultural contexts so as not to impose their own values on others. She is now the director of the Multicultural Family Institute. She is also one of the important figures in developing the use of genograms in family assessment. Her approach is from a family systems point of view.

In a chapter in the 1982 edition of *Normal Family Processes* McGoldrick made frequent generalizations about various ethnicities and their approach to therapy. About Jewish people, she wrote:

Parents take great pride in children's verbal skill, intelligence and ability to think things out logically. Jewish families are more likely than all other ethnic groups to seek and be receptive to psychotherapy in almost any form. They value talk, insight...Willingness to talk about trouble and feelings are important assets but can also lead to problems. Families may get so preoccupied with the need to analyze...they become immobilized. Jewish patients frequently wish to appear intellectual and psychologically aware (p. 409).

However in later editions, McGoldrick revised her prior broad generalizations about various ethnicities. She removed all of what she had written above about Jewish people. Perhaps this reflects some of the balance between both acknowledging cultural differences, and being slow to act on various stereotypes made about ethnicities, which can appear prejudicial and also do not reflect the differences that occur within a group.

In 2001, the Surgeon General published the report *Mental Health: Culture, Race and Ethnicity*. The report recognized that culture has a large impact on what occurs in the clinical setting. Culture accounts for variations in how individuals communicate symptoms and affects which symptoms they report. The report notes as well that some sets of symptoms are more common in some societies and that culture bears upon the type of coping devices, and social supports an individual has. Additionally some cultures might also uniquely feature strengths such as resilience and adaptive ways of coping.

Counseling in Intercultural Relationships

It was not until the late 1970s in Hawaii that psychologists began to study and consider counseling in intercultural relationships (Sullivan, 2006), and not until 1990 (Ho) that an entire book was devoted to marriage therapy with intercultural couples. A seminal work was Falicov's (1995) chapter in the *Clinical Handbook of Couple Therapy*, "Cross-Cultural Marriages," firstly by nature of its inclusion in this handbook and secondly for the way it examined the aspects of cultural differences in couples (Sullivan, 2006). Falicov describes many problematic outcomes with these couples and then introduces the idea that couples who intermarry enter into a form of "cultural transition" (p. 231). She describes cultural transition as a necessary task for a couple to arrive at a balanced view of their similarities and differences. She further concludes that variations in the way couples adapt to this task of dealing with cultural differences are diagnostic in themselves. She sees the importance of a couple developing a new "cultural code" that integrates parts of both cultural heritages. Falicov's view is that intercultural couples in distress usually have an impoverished, unbalanced, or distorted view of their cultural similarities and differences (p. 245). Conversely, couples who achieve a more appropriately focused style of dealing with cultural differences are more likely to integrate them in a manner that is enriching to both parties.

Sullivan and Cotton (2006) in an overview of the work to date on intercultural couple therapy detail different approaches to intercultural couple therapy revealing different concerns among therapists about the needs and purposes of intercultural therapy. They broadly characterize most approaches as coming from one of three different perspectives. The first category included those works that took a racially based approach and were most concerned with issues related to power differentials. Sullivan and Cotton

see this approach as being limited because cultural issues in marriage extend far beyond simple issues of race. The second broad category of literature in their review is primarily concerned with organizing cultures according to national origins and backgrounds. This approach is also limited because it does not address the cultural differences that occur within a nation and can be politically focused at times. The third category of approaches to intercultural couple therapy classified by Sullivan and Cotton, which is the most relevant to this thesis, examines the sources of distress couples experience specifically from their intercultural relationship. Sullivan and Cotton take the position that the additional sources of difficulties which intercultural couples experience can come from a variety of cultural differences related to “faiths, cultures, nationalities, and races...[as well as from] beliefs and traditions” (p. 222).

Overall, Sullivan and Cotton (2006) conclude that further work needs to be done regarding intercultural couple therapy. They state that too much attention has been paid to issues of race and oppression and not enough to the multitude of differences presented by intercultural relationships. Another weakness of the available work, according to them, is “the relative lack of empirical research on different couples’ cultural arrangements” (p. 224).

Waldman and Rubalcava (2005) come to a similar conclusion that there has been comparatively little work done on therapy with intercultural couples. They state,

[Little has been written] about the role of culture and the experience of culture in influencing the individual and couple psychodynamics in these intercultural marriages....A number of articles have been published about conducting psychotherapy with ethnic minorities from an analytically informed perspective

but this literature lacks in an explication of how growing up within a culture structures the unconscious ways in which individuals will experience and respond to each other (p. 227).

Overall, while there may not be much literature examining therapy with intercultural couples, there are still some valuable insights. In a 1986 study (Giladi-McKelvie) intercultural couples that stayed together demonstrated an ability to deal with differences flexibly and in a positive way. The study also found that understanding cultural differences was helpful in accepting differences and resolving conflicts. Another common distinction of couples that stayed together was the importance of religion. This study showed a high value of having a thought out approach to raising children that both parents can agree upon.

Crohn (1998) writes about the difficulties associated with couples that blend cultural and religious identities: “Although they traditionally overlap, culture and religion are not the same” (p. 300). Crohn encourages couples to frame their differences in five areas: gender roles, family cohesion, emotional expression, cultural identity, and religion. By doing this, a couple is better able to see and understand the issues relating to their joint cultural and religious identity.

Crohn’s model is similar to the five areas put forward by this thesis. Two of the five areas, identity and extended family are essentially the same. Two of Crohn’s areas, emotional expression and gender roles, are not part of the five area decision grid of this paper but are recommended in other areas of the paper as a counselor seeks to bring better understanding of cultural differences to the couple in general. This paper’s

decision grid further encourages couples to frame Crohn's category of religion into the three categories of community, traditions and faith.

As Crohn encourages therapists to distinguish between the ideas of culture and religion and help couples see all the various dimensions, Walsh (2010) encourages therapists to separate the ideas and practices of religion and spirituality, particularly when dealing with what she calls multi-faith families. Her contention is that many clinicians are trained to simply note religion in the same way they make note of race or ethnicity without assessing it any further (Walsh, 2009). Simon (2005) agrees with this assessment and even goes further by saying that family therapists have generally resisted discussing the experience of spirituality to avoid confusion with religious counseling. Ahn (2010) believes clinicians are ill-equipped to address spiritual issues in part because of the ethical issues surrounding the use of religion when involved in publicly funded treatment centers where many marriage and family therapists accumulate hours for licensure. Walsh (2010) also believes the concepts of religion and spirituality are often blurred in research and public surveys.

Walsh (2009) writes that the spiritual practices of an individual in a particular religion can vary greatly, so it is important not to make assumptions based on a client's identified religion, but rather understand their lived experience of faith. It is important to probe the meaning and importance of spiritual beliefs and practices in clients' lives and relationships. She encourages clinicians to understand a couple's spiritual beliefs and practices, as they can be a source of distress and also a potential resource.

She says that the separation of religion and spirituality is all the more important given the trend towards an increasing amount of multi-faith families. She encourages

family therapists to help facilitate the creation of a multi-faith family's own blend of beliefs and practices that nourishes their family's spiritual needs. She says with childrearing comes necessary decisions about spiritual upbringing.

Jewish Intercultural

There is a lot of available literature written about the rise of Jewish intermarriage, particularly coming from within the Jewish community. The concern of these resources is to better understand the implications of intermarriage for the Jewish community and to formulate plans to respond that ensure the ongoing health of the community. Schlossberg and Hecker (1998) wrote that because raising a Jewish family is central to Jewish survival, marrying outside the faith can be much more traumatic than occurrences of intermarriage in other religions. Sussman and Alexander (1999) say that Jewish religious leaders tend to take the position that intermarriage will result in a loss of ethnic identity. Leher (2004) writes that marrying Jewish is seen as key to Jewish survival, therefore intermarrying is not only a matter of religion, but also is often seen as rejecting one's family, abandoning and being a traitor to one's people, and even as helping to exterminate Judaism (p. 16). As a result these community pressures lead to additional stress on Jewish "interfaith" couples.

A large study (Buck, 2005) done on the children of Jewish intermarried couples funded by the Jewish Outreach Institute recommends that the Jewish community begin reaching out actively to these children and offers advice based on their study. Other authors take a more sociological perspective and focus on the mixture of religions that occur in Jewish intermarriage (Cogan, 2000; Hartman, 2001; Rebhun, 1999).

Regarding literature written specifically about counseling Jewish intercultural couples, Gleckman and Streicher (1990) note the increase in Jewish intermarriage and the number of social scientists and popular writers who write about the inherent difficulties in those marriages. The article warns that there may be an influx of these families in mental health facilities for counseling. Also addressed is the impact found on the children of these families and on relationships with extended family. Later studies on Jewish “interfaith” couples (Chinitz, 2001; Sussman, 1999) show high rates of marital dissatisfaction. They advise mental health professionals to be aware of the complex dynamics of these relationships, in the hidden cultural expectations and potential extended family conflicts. They advise counselors to help the couples gain understanding of their varied cultural expectations and practices and to help the couples see more options and possibilities for support and compromise (Eaton, 1994). A more recent work (Shaffer, 2008) concurs with these existing resources on the subject.

Schlossberger and Hecker (1998) study how Jewishness compares to other ethnicities in its implications for family therapy. They find that where some ethnic groups are fully assimilated within a generation or two, Jewish culture remains a powerful influence even on those who consider themselves marginally Jewish. They also present Jewish people as uniquely culturally receptive to the practice of family therapy; a conclusion also reached by McGoldrick (1982).

There have been two studies done on the use of premarital training for Jewish-Christian “interfaith” couples. One examines the effects of having a program (Lager, 1997), and the other presents a suggested model for premarital therapy (Brody, 2003). That model includes having couples look at each other’s spiritual and religious histories,

examining influences of culture on relationships, and working through issues with extended family. The specific “interfaith” preparation is then combined with more general premarital preparations, which includes conflict resolution and the close examination of marital expectations.

Children of Jewish Intercultural Couples

Previous studies indicate that the healthiest and most beneficial situations for children of Jewish intercultural couples are situations where they are exposed to the religious traditions and history of both parents (Mayer, 1985; Schneider, 1989). Petsonk and Remson (1988) see the importance of Jewish intercultural couples exhibiting a united front for the religious aspirations for their children. They write that without religious consistency children have a propensity for insecurity, depression, and exhibit other problematic behaviors.

In a 1990 Jewish population survey it was discovered that twice as many children of Jewish intercultural couples were being raised Christian as were being raised Jewish (Leher, 2004). Cowan (1987), when interviewing the children of Jewish-Christian parents, indicates that children, while desiring to be rooted in one of the parent’s traditions, still want connection and exposure to the other parent’s tradition as well.

Leher (2004) says that overall there has been relatively little research done on the children of Jewish intercultural couples, saying the research is still in its “infancy” (p. 35). Leher conducted a survey of 370 children of “Jewish-Gentile interfaith couples.” They were tested for psychological well being and cultural identification. She concluded that there was no difference in psychological well being for children of interfaith parents as compared to those of intrafaith parents. She also discovered, contrary to her initial

hypothesis, that in terms of cultural identity formation, children of interfaith couples were more advanced. She uses Erikson's definition of identity formation to make this determination. She speculates that those families may be more intentional and thoughtful about their decisions than intrafaith families.

Christian Perspective on Jewish Intercultural Couples

Zaretsky (2004) is the only academic work available to this author which seeks to study Jewish intercultural couples from a Christian perspective. Zaretsky (2004) identifies four areas where Jewish intercultural couples tend to have conflicts: identity, religious observance, life cycle events, and child rearing. He also identifies four distinct stages in a relationship: dating, wedding, marriage, and marriage with kids. Zaretsky sees a pattern in the nature of a couple's conflict as they proceed through these four stages. In the first stage of dating there is very little intercultural conflict. Oftentimes the couple finds few differences in themselves, and the differences they find are often fun and interesting, and they can enjoy exploring them. The second stage he terms the wedding stage, involves the preparation for the wedding and the serious contemplation of marriage. For many couples, this is the first real encounter with the consequences of being in an interfaith/intercultural situation. The couple is forced to make decisions about which traditions they are going to follow for the wedding ceremony itself. They discover conflicts with their parents over celebratory rituals. Who will perform the wedding? Can they say "Jesus" in the ceremony? Will it be in a synagogue or a church or at a neutral site? Judd (1990) writes that the wedding is often the first encounter a couple has with the Jewish community as a couple and is often surprised by how lacking in acceptance it can be.

In Zaretsky's (2004) third stage, marriage without children, he again finds a more peaceful stage like dating, as couples often avoid making difficult long-term decisions about family life. The fourth stage of being married with children is then the most difficult and conflict-laden stage because a couple is forced to make consequential decisions about how they are going to raise their children. As conflict becomes more intense, hurt and regret may surface as well as conflict with extended family.

Zaretsky believes that this demographic of couples is unique among Jewish groups as actively seeking assistance for their relational issues. He further believes these couples can be helped by being given insight and by being encouraged to maintain dual ethnicities while experiencing a spiritual unity through faith in Jesus, which could result in bringing stabilization to their marriage and family.

David Rudolph (2003), a Messianic Jew, in a non-academic book, encourages Jewish-Gentile couples to find a place of common worship in Messianic congregations. He addresses the issue from a largely biblical and evangelistic perspective. He does not focus on counseling issues. While Zaretsky touches on various counseling issues, Zaretsky's discipline is primarily missiology and not counseling.

Ethics

Considering one of the goals of this paper's approach is being able to use the discipline of counseling to help Jewish intercultural couples see the possibility for spiritual unity in Jesus, it is important to survey the relevant ethical codes. Codes from a secular standpoint will be considered first, and then codes from a specifically Christian point of view will be addressed.

A primary concern of all ethical codes for a counselor is to avoid harming their clients (American Counseling Association [ACA] A.4.a; American Psychological Association [APA] Principle A, 3.04; American Association of Marriage and Family Therapists [AAMFT] 3.7). A second concern is that counselors respect the values of their clients and are careful not to impose their own values (ACA A.4.b; APA Principle E) while respecting the client's right to make their own decisions (AAMFT 1.8).

The American Association of Christian Counselors (AACC) code of ethics speaks a bit more specifically to the issues presented in this paper. That code also recognizes the commitment not to do any harm to the client (1-110), the commitment to care for any client regardless of their value or lifestyle (1-101), and the need to respect people of different faiths and religions, seeking to understand their values in order to help clients make informed decisions (1-550).

The AACC code of ethics does recognize a Christian counselor's right to explicitly incorporate spiritual practices into all forms of counseling and intervention (6th Foundation), but Christian counselors should not presume that all clients want or will be receptive to spiritual interventions so they are always to respect a client's choice and receptivity [or lack thereof] to those practices (1-330). AACC code of ethics states that a Christian counselor shares their faith "only as a function of legitimate self-disclosure and when appropriate to client need, always maintaining a humility that exposes and never imposes the way of Christ" (1-550).

Conclusion

Overall there has been a limited but growing amount of research done on counseling with intercultural couples in general and even less work done with Jewish

intercultural couples specifically. It is not surprising then that the Christian counseling community has yet to produce any work relating to this specific demographic.

However, a significant amount of the work does support many of the conclusions reached by this present thesis. Almost all of the research supports the importance of couples being able to separate the various cultural, religious, and spiritual issues involved. The research also supports the importance for a couple coming to understand their differences and find a deliberate and consistent way of navigating child rearing. Of particular interest is Walsh's (2010) recent work on distinguishing spiritual beliefs and practices from religious affiliation. This supports this thesis' approach in helping Jewish intercultural couples not only break out their religious affiliation into spiritual and communal/cultural components but in helping them see the possibility of spiritual unity as a couple while maintaining their distinct cultural identities.

CHAPTER 4

ASSESSMENT OF FAMILY

John and Rachel (pseudonyms are being used to protect confidentiality) have occasionally attended a church where the author first met them. John is Gentile and comes from a Christian background, while Rachel is Jewish. They are living together, and engaged to be married. They approached the author asking for help primarily in deciding if they should raise Rachel's three-year-old daughter, Lily, Jewish or Christian, and secondarily for help in their own relationship as it pertains to questions their interfaith situation has raised.

Personal and Relational History

Rachel is 44 years old. She has never been married. About four years ago Rachel began dating John. John is also 44 and was married once before in his late 20s for three years, but does not have any children. About six years ago, Rachel decided she wanted to have a child, and was nearing the age when she would be unable to have children. Consequently, she began the process of finding a sperm donor to be artificially inseminated. It took her three years to become pregnant, and now she has a three-year-old daughter named Lily.

While they were dating, John was aware Rachel was attempting to become pregnant, but did not feel that they were serious enough in their relationship to have children at that time. John was supportive of Rachel through the process and they continued to date through Rachel's pregnancy and the birth of her daughter. Rachel and John's relationship steadily became more serious, and last December they made a commitment to become married and moved in together. Today, Rachel says John

considers Lily his daughter, and Lily calls John her Dad, but at the time of Lily's birth, John did not feel any connection or commitment to Lily. As his relationship has developed with Rachel so too has his sense of commitment towards Lily. They have now been engaged for 18 months and have yet to set a wedding date.

When asked what he saw in Rachel, John said she was "full of love for everyone," had a "genuine care about people," always wants to "help everybody" and that she was "smart, even though she doesn't think so." Rachel, in answering the same question about John, said it was "his character." John was "honest and loyal." She knew he would never be a "liar or cheater" and he always "told the truth." John was a man of integrity. She said it was that character, that "him, I wanted" and that he made her "feel better" about herself when she was around him. Rachel said she had "never seen it before" in any man. She began talking about the lack of character in all her past boyfriends. She said she had always wanted a man of "character" but she didn't think it was possible. Rachel said the only one man she had ever known like him in character was her grandfather. She said she had given up hope that she could ever find a man like that. She remarked that her grandfather was "quiet" like John and that her grandfather was also like John in that he was not very "introspective." Rachel wondered about whether there was a reason that John was so much like her grandfather whom she respected. Had she subconsciously chosen a man like her grandfather, or do qualities like being quiet and introspective just tend to come together in Rachel's view of character?

John said that it took him a long time "to trust" and "to give myself up" to Rachel. John thinks it was because of his divorce. John saw a psychologist to help him understand his reluctance to trust and commit to Rachel. He would tell Rachel he "loved

her as a person, but was not *in love* with her.” Rachel said she felt very hurt by this and confused. When asked what exactly he meant by that statement, John kind of shrugged and repeated the statement in slightly different words.

Rachel said she gave him a hard time about being “emotionally unavailable” and that she felt “unloved.” When asked why she stayed with John through this time, Rachel said it must be “low self-esteem” in a half joking, half serious tone. It was not until two to three years into their relationship, when Rachel was pregnant, that he finally said he loved her. When he did, Rachel said it was “anti-climatic” as she did not feel “wow,” but rather she was “proud of him” that he was finally able to say it. She said she believed he did love her but just couldn’t bring himself to admit it and tell her.

Rachel said she was shocked when John asked her to marry him, saying she had “no idea it was coming.” Rachel had said they would not live together until they were engaged. They moved in together shortly after this. They are currently living in a multi-family home owned by Rachel.

Rachel’s Family of Origin

Rachel was raised by her single mother Judy. Judy’s parents, Lila and Jake, and her grandmother’s best friend Izzy, were also very involved in raising Rachel. Izzy is from a family of nine children and is of Portuguese descent. Rachel considers Izzy family, and even named her daughter after her, Lily Izzy—the first name being after her grandmother, Lila, and the second, Izzy. Speaking of her grandmother Lila and Izzy’s friendship, Rachel said they gave each other “nothing but joy, laughter, companionship, [and] love.”

Rachel describes her father, Gail, as “absentee” since she was a year old in 1966 when he divorced Rachel’s mother. Rachel said it later turned out Gail was not actually Rachel’s real biological father, but Rachel still thinks of him as her father. She said Gail was a “tortured” man. Rachel said Gail’s father’s twin sister, as well as 14 other siblings and Gail’s grandparents all were killed in the Holocaust, with only Gail’s father escaping. Gail’s father died before Rachel was born, but Rachel wonders how the trauma her grandfather experienced affected Gail. She had very little contact with Gail throughout her childhood and at this point has no contact with him.

Rachel does not know anything about her biological father. When Rachel was 29 years old her mother told her that Gail was not her real father, but that she had been impregnated by a sperm donor. Upon learning this information, Rachel immediately went to try to discover the identity of her biological father, but she said that back then they did not keep good records of these things, so she was not able to find out any information. She resents her mother for waiting so long to tell her. She said in a joking tone that her mother could have “saved her years of therapy from feeling rejected by Gail,” whom she thought was her father.

Rachel’s maternal grandmother had one sister and her grandfather had one brother, but growing up Rachel had little contact with any of her extended family. Rachel’s mother, grandparents, and Izzy are all still living in Rhode Island where Rachel was raised.

Rachel has one brother three years older whom she described as “mentally ill.” She said he was only diagnosed as bipolar a year ago, though he had long been on medication for Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder. She said he had learning

disabilities throughout their childhood. She also described him as a “sex addict” who attended Sex Addicts Anonymous. She said he was “horrible to me, my whole life,” “sarcastic,” “cutting,” but now with his bipolar medication he is “kinder and gentler.” Rachel said it is a bit disconcerting to see and interact with her brother now. For her, it is a bit like suddenly having a different brother.

Rachel described her mother as “horrible” and a “disaster.” She said as a mother she was “nurturing and loving” and she “was there” when Rachel had various crises. But beyond that “she has no redeeming qualities.” She listed the following characteristics as descriptive of her mother: “manipulative, self-centered, needs to be the center of attention, dumb, stupid, lazy, low-functioning, and addictive.” She said her mother was explosive, often yelling, and she also gambled and smoked. She credits her ability to survive to her grandparents and Izzy.

John’s Family of Origin

John’s mother and father have been married for 45 years. He is the oldest of four children. He has one brother a year younger than himself and two sisters, eight and thirteen years younger. All of John’s family live in the greater Boston area and remain in close contact with one another. John’s younger brother got divorced but has remarried and now both he and his wife are “super devout” Catholics. Additionally, his two sisters are both very “religious.” John is closest to his younger sister, Rachelle, who is single, a nurse and attends an evangelical church. John’s other sister, Bethany is married with two children and is also a strong believer in Jesus.

John and Rachel both admire John’s parents and their strong marriage. John has limited knowledge of his father’s family. His father is the only child of his grandparents.

His grandmother had been previously married without children. John's mother has a large extended family. John is able to trace her family to his great-great grandparents, and has contact with many distant cousins, as well as four first cousins and their children. John's mother has one brother and one sister. Her brother, "Uncle Bill", seems to be very important to John. Rachel said, "John is so happy when he is around Bill...It is like he is his fullest self." Rachel went on to describe Bill as a "quasi-Dad," "big brother," and "something special to John." John said he never noticed how significant Bill was to him until Rachel said it, but he agreed and spoke of his great respect and care for Bill. John said he is the "always cool uncle," always with a "quip or piece of insight." Bill is a pastor, psychologist and "spiritual counselor" with "multiple degrees," and Bill's wife, Ann, is a nurse, "spiritual healer," and "Christian author." It seems that John's most important relationships are all with devoted Christians.

Both Rachel and John described John's family as being a very close family, with a very "warm environment" which Rachel "longs for." Yet, oddly to Rachel, "they never talk about anything of importance." Both Rachel and John say that Rachel has changed the family dynamic significantly, in that she forces them to have "real conversations" with one another. They say that the family used to be a "Cobb salad" in that all the parts were separated but now Rachel gets them talking.

Rachel said John's parents want her and John to "believe in Jesus, or else we won't go to heaven." She said they want John to be "faithful in his faith" and are always "happy when they [hear that John and Rachel] go to church." Rachel feels that for John to raise Lily Jewish would be to go against his family. John said that he does not get any

“verbal pressure from anyone in his family.” But Rachel has said that is because they are never “confrontative [*sic*]” and never actually talk about anything serious like this.

But Rachel has felt the need to “hide her being Jewish from his family” for the five years they have been together. If not an “outright hiding, then very downplayed.” Rachel feels that she has “sold out” and she is “angry for selling herself out and wanting to be liked.” She went on to call it “Jewish self-loathing” and “wanting to be accepted.” (Jewish self-loathing is a pejorative expression used within the Jewish community to describe those Jewish people who are ashamed of or uncomfortable with being Jewish.) Now Rachel feels that she can’t tell John’s family that she is an “atheist.” John was resistant to agreeing to Rachel’s comment that he “hides” her Jewish background. Rachel challenged John and said they had attended Rosh Hashanah service together this year, and when his family called to ask what they were doing John declined to tell them. John conceded, but said it was just because it was too complex of a discussion to have at that moment.

John’s Faith

John was raised in a “Baptist home.” He said at age 12 his parents began to become more devoted and serious in their faith and their family moved to an Assemblies of God church. John’s father had done ministry in prisons and because of this he started a ministry to people getting out of prison. John spoke about his father being very busy and highly devoted to establishing this ministry. His father became an ordained minister in the Charismatic Episcopal Church. John said that he accepted Jesus at an Assemblies of God church and was baptized at age 14. He saw other teens “doing it,” but he said he waited because “he only wanted to do it when he really meant it.” He was very involved

in the youth group and said he regularly read the Bible, prayed and shared his faith. After he graduated from high school he slowly drifted from church. He was still living with his family and was attending a local college. When asked what his parents said about his drifting from church, he replied, "We never talk about serious things," and "my Dad was busy building his ministry." John got married at the age of 29 to a non-practicing Jewish woman. John's dad, a minister, refused to perform the wedding because she was not a Christian, but John said they "wouldn't have wanted him anyway." After getting a divorce less than three years later, he started going back to church. He said he was "re-visiting" his faith, and after going through a hard time he felt "very alone." But after two or three years, that "fizzled out." Now at age 44, he wants to start going back to church again for Lily. He wants to raise her in church. When asked why, he said he wants Lily to be "exposed to the faith so she can choose for herself." When asked about his personal faith, John seemed to feel uncomfortable and unsure how to answer, eventually saying he "had not thought about it that much." When the observation was made that it seemed that when he talked about faith he seemed to talk about his parents' faith rather than his own, in a sense filtering his faith through his parents', Rachel quickly agreed, and John said he had "never thought about that" but that it "could be true." When asked to elaborate John said, "I'm not very introspective." Rachel then asked John, "Would your faith survive without your parents?" John responded, "I'm not sure."

His faith seemed to be at Fowler's (1984) synthetic-conventional stage in that he basically had a child-like faith in conformity with his parents, and has never developed a personal individuated faith, which is why on one hand he can say he believes things like Jesus died for his sins and rose from the dead, yet that faith seems to have no practical

outworking in his adult life. Perhaps for John, going to church is more about family values and traditions than it is about faith. When this was suggested to John and Rachel, they agreed. Rachel said that is what she has thought all along “but didn’t want to say,” but “John does have a firm faith in God...just not really centered around Jesus.”

Rachel’s Faith

Rachel openly calls herself an “atheist”. She went to synagogue growing up and had a *Bat-Mitzvah*, although she would not say she went to synagogue “every week.” Her family celebrated the holidays but was not kosher. Rachel says that her mother does not “live Jewishly” but is the one who is pressuring her to raise Lily Jewish. Rachel said that it was when she was a teenager that she stopped believing in God. She explained that it was not anything dramatic, she just realized that when she asked herself if she believed in God, she just did not. It was not so much a decision against God, but rather “a faith...[she] did not have.”

Rachel still enjoys going to synagogue, particularly on the High Holidays, and thinks she and John should belong to a synagogue. John is confused as to why the services are important to Rachel. John attended Rosh Hashanah with Rachel and was frustrated because he “can’t understand what is going on and why.” John could not understand why Rachel didn’t care that she could not understand the Hebrew, or much of what was actually happening in the service. In counseling it was discussed how it is common for Jewish people not to care about the specific meaning of what is going on in the service, because the experience of synagogue is more communal in nature and less about “content.” Rachel agreed and said for Jews believing in “one God” is a communal experience, and not an actual belief, and it is what separates them from Christians.

Rachel stressed the pride she feels as being part of the Jewish people. Rachel said that education and intelligence are very important to Jewish people. John feels that Jewish people have “an intellectual snobbery.” John was quick to say that this was not the case with Rachel, but Rachel appeared to feel uncomfortable about this, and said they had spoken before about John’s resentment towards Jewish people and their value of education.

It appears that there may be some dynamic in John and Rachel’s relationship surrounding Rachel having more education than John does. Rachel frequently speaks of her ability to “think critically” when John frequently says he is “not introspective” and frequently answers questions with “I never thought about that.” John does not say this phrase with any sense of embarrassment but more as a statement about the way he is.

With regard to her daughter, Lily, Rachel said, “I want her to believe in God...so she will have guidance, direction and grounding” like “John’s family.” Although Rachel is an atheist, she said she is drawn to the peace, security and hope that John’s family has because of their faith: “how when bad things happen they can believe there are reasons.” Rachel wants this faith for her daughter. But when asked about the potential contradiction of wanting her daughter to believe in God when she is an atheist, Rachel replied, “Everyone seems to believe it. Could they all be wrong?” Although Rachel seems comfortable calling herself an atheist, she seems very drawn to the idea of believing in God.

Rachel’s Relational History

Rachel said she has “had lots of relationships” and “many, many boyfriends,...not that she had sex with them all,” she quickly added, saying she didn’t want “John to think

that.” She has been single her whole life but has lived with three different men. She said that before John, Mike was the “love of her life.” She was with him six years from ages 16 through 22 and they lived together during the summers home from college. She has said that she has experienced every kind of relationship. She talked about one relationship in the mid 90s that was terrifying. She had to get a restraining order against the man she was living with. He “choked” her and “pinned her down” and threatened her. She considers her great mistake was “taking him back.” She calls herself “stupid” and “blames” herself for what happened after. She said it took her two years to escape that relationship. She said he wouldn’t leave her house for six to nine months, and when asked why she didn’t call the police Rachel said the boyfriend threatened her that he would mutilate himself if she did, and then accuse her of cutting him so the Bar would take away her law license. She was convinced he would do it. She said this relationship was “humbling” in that she was a “failure” and “lost respect for herself.” She said that people had always come to her for wisdom and they were the ones making “dumb decisions.” Now in this case, she was the one making the “dumb decision.”

A year later she began an “on again/off again” five-year relationship with Michael until 2003. It was Michael who introduced her to John. John and Rachel are still friends with Michael. Rachel also said that it was after Michael that she realized she was still single and that now in her late thirties she decided, “I want a kid.”

John’s Relational History

John married a Jewish woman when he was 29. They were divorced three years later. John said he did not want the divorce and tried to get his wife to go to counseling with him, but his wife said, “it was too late for counseling.” It appeared to hit John from

out of the blue. When asked about what John thought led to the breakdown in his relationship, John said he didn't know and he wondered if it was because "he was traveling a lot." He said, following his divorce, he was "devastated," and experienced a deep sadness that lasted for years. He did not date anyone seriously until he met Rachel five years ago, approximately seven years after his divorce.

Rachel's Education and Work History

Rachel attended college and received a Bachelor in Psychology and Sociology. She said she finished at "the top of [her] class." She became a social worker in the Boston area involved in community mediation. She had to go to court frequently as part of her job and became interested in the legal system. She decided to pursue that interest and attend law school. She said it was a "humbling experience" as she was in the "middle of the pack" in law school. She spoke about always being at the top, so this was a big adjustment for her. She said that she lost her identity as a "smart" person and that because of her performance in law school she could not get hired by a top firm. Instead she worked for a mid-level firm, and began to do more work in family law. Eight years ago she went out on her own working with family law. She said that she mostly works with divorce cases. She explained that people come to her and "dump" their problems on her and expect her to "fix them." She described this experience by a sentiment that she often feels more like a marriage counselor than a divorce lawyer.

John's Education and Work History

John worked in media starting in high school and worked full-time putting himself through college to obtain a degree in media communication. He became a

soundman, working on video shoots for the past 16 or 17 years. Three years ago he injured his back and has been unable to work since and is now on disability. Being a soundman involves a great deal of physical lifting, so he is doubtful that he will ever be able to return to his profession. John's professional future is unknown. John seems to spend his time caring for their home and caring for Lily. They both say that John frequently has bouts of pain that leave him unable to get off his back. John is also pursuing a lawsuit to be able to be fully compensated for his disability.

Conceptualization

There are a number of external pressures and difficulties that complicate John and Rachel's relationship. The first complexity comes with Rachel choosing to become inseminated and have a baby while she was in a relationship with John. John was with her through her pregnancy and birth, but not as a committed partner. It seems Rachel was willing to have a more committed relationship, but John was not. But Rachel decided she was going to have a baby, with or without John. Rachel still seems to be hurt by John's slowness in being able to say that he loves her and his desire to marry her. A dynamic seems to exist that John is passive and allows himself to "not think about things" almost as an excuse. Rachel correspondingly "feels frustrated" and "unloved," then simply takes action, unwilling to wait for John's indecision to resolve. This dynamic of John's passivity and Rachel's pattern of taking action can also be seen when Rachel speaks for John, describing John's struggles and activities in situations where John could have easily spoken for himself

John has embraced Lily as his own for the past two years, so his limited involvement and commitment in her first year may not directly affect his relationship

with her. But Rachel and John appear to be frustrated in their parenting. They are hesitant to cross Lily's will. They initially asked for parenting and discipline advice, but responded to most parenting suggestions with "that will not work...Lily won't do that." They seem resistant to using discipline of any kind. Rachel would often cite her own mother's failures. Perhaps she fears that she will do to Lily, what she believes her mother did to her. John seems again to be more passive in general.

Their "interfaith" situation appears to them to be their most pressing issue. The four options that seem open to them, "attend church, attend synagogue, attend both, or attend nothing," are all dissatisfying for them as a couple and they have trouble understanding their priorities and discussing these issues. John's family is clearly a communal strength, but the level of his family's religious devotion places pressure on John and Rachel's relationship in that it makes Rachel feel like an outsider. John seems to be able to function with his family's religious commitments. He seems to not worry about their desire for him to be "more committed" to church and to God. When asked how that pressure and expectation affect him, John simply says he doesn't "think about it." Perhaps this way of coping with his parents has applied in some extent to coping with his differences with Rachel. John seems to have the ability to simply not be aware in a conscious way of his parents' feelings towards him. It may be that this is the same way he has dealt with complexities and difficulties in his relationship with Rachel, in that he simply does not think about what Rachel may be thinking or feeling.

In contrast to John's tendency not to discuss differences or difficulties, Rachel is very anxious to discuss what is concerning her and appears to have a tendency to think in "black or white." For example, she either "believes in God" or she is an "atheist." She is

either “responsible” or a “failure.” Her past relationships tend to be either “wonderful” or “horrible.” This contrast between John and Rachel may have been a source of difficulty in their inability to have serious conversations on their religious, parenting, and marital timing questions and may present more difficulty in resolving them in therapy.

Rachel has had a number of relationships in the past, but no long-term committed relationships. Now with a daughter, Rachel says she is seeking more permanence in this relationship than she has in her past relationships. However, Rachel’s relationship history may indicate ambivalence to committed relationships.

Lastly, Rachel and John have very different intellectual values and educations. John has mentioned his resentment of Jewish people’s emphasis on education and his characterization of that as “snobby.” Rachel has far more education than John. This dynamic may be accentuated by Rachel’s providing for the family as a lawyer and Jeff being unable to work.

John and Rachel do appear to have some relational strengths. During sessions they speak fondly of one another. Even when differing they are kind and respectful to one another. When asked about their arguments, they seem to be able to resolve some conflicts well without escalating. And, in general, they appear mature as people. They both appear to care deeply about their daughter Lily.

Therapeutic Plan

The therapeutic plan is based on Nongoma’s (2005) method using problem selection, problem definition, goal development, objective construction, and intervention creation.

Step one: problem selection. The primary problem that John and Rachel presented was the difficulty and confusion with regard to knowing how to raise Rachel's daughter, Lily. They could not decide whether to raise her Jewish or Christian. They were seeking guidance as to how to make that decision. A secondary problem for them is the struggle in relating to John's very religious family. Other problems are John's potential dependence issues and Rachel's tendency towards black and white thinking.

Step two: problem definition. John and Rachel's presenting question of what religion to raise Lily in will be the problem to design an intervention for. There are two primary ways in which the problem manifests itself in their lives, firstly, with the indecision and conflict that occurs in parenting Lily, and secondly with John and Rachel's personal and relational unease as they experience their individual religious communities. Regarding the indecision, Rachel and John feel a lot of anxiety over what they see as impending questions from Lily over what religion she will be raised in. Rachel does not want Lily to be confused, and she says Lily needs to know if she is Jewish or a Christian. She says Lily is beginning to ask questions. But Rachel feels a lot of pressure and strain because she doesn't know how to make this decision. John feels strongly that he wants Lily to attend church, but he knows Rachel is uncomfortable with that. And even though they both consider Lily to be John's daughter, it seems that relationally they may defer to Rachel as the ultimate authority over *her* daughter. Perhaps this may change once they are married.

Rachel is drawn to the Christian Church, mainly because of John's family. She appreciates the confidence and hope with which they approach life, but she is troubled because Christianity confuses her, and she feels that church is a world that, as a Jew, she

can never be a part of. Rachel cried at the prospect of believing something different than her daughter.

But at the same time, Rachel also wants to go together as a family to a place of worship, and the church is how John was raised and where he feels comfortable. Rachel does not want to force John to go to a synagogue. Rachel and John say Rachel's mother is adamant that she wants Lily to be raised Jewish. It does not appear that the pressure from Rachel's mother is a deciding factor for them, but it creates added pressure for them as a couple, and "guilt" for Rachel.

John has been willing to go to synagogue, but is very uncomfortable there and feels that he is an outsider. He is frustrated that he cannot understand what is being said and done. Rachel feels John is ashamed and embarrassed to tell his family when he goes to the synagogue. So the indecision as to what religious community to raise Lily in creates relationship friction, anxiety and problems with extended family.

Step three: goal development. The goal is to help John and Rachel navigate the decision about how to raise Lily. This involves helping them to first acknowledge and talk about their struggle with the decision, both to give them clarity and to help them understand and have empathy for one another. Another goal is to help them to see a broader range of potential solutions besides simply choosing to be Jewish or Christian, and to accept some of the inevitable ambiguity that comes in the decisions they will need to make.

Part of this goal is also to help Rachel and John in their process of making decisions in general. It is here that some of the dynamics surrounding John's passivity

and unwillingness to “think about” things and Rachel’s tendency to make the decisions by herself in response to John’s indecision may be addressed.

Step four: objective construction. The objective here is for John and Rachel to discuss some specific possibilities about how to raise Lily, beyond the oversimplified categories of Jewish or Christian. The objective is for them to discuss their understandings of their own faith, in regard to questions of identity, community, belief, tradition, and extended family. They also might be able to articulate an understanding of each other’s sense of what they find important in the decision, and how it will impact one another. For example, Rachel will gain a better understanding of why and how being Jewish is important to her and also be able to understand John’s concerns and objections.

Step five: intervention creation. Reflections about the ongoing experiences they are having as a couple in church and synagogue will be continued. These reflections will be accompanied by the use of role reversal to help them gain empathy and insight into each other’s experiences. Homework will be given for them to complete and discuss each week. The homework will help them to discuss and understand their respective cultural and religious histories with a view towards identifying traditions and religious/cultural practices that are of particular significance to each of them. Part of the homework will also be to identify those traditions and religious/cultural practices that they want to continue with Lily. Part of this process is to identify and discuss those practices that are particularly difficult for their partner to accept or understand. For example, John may discover and discuss why a nativity scene in his house at Christmas time is so important to him, and Rachel will help John understand why a nativity scene makes her feel so uncomfortable. They would then experiment with designing a December that they would

like to have as a family. This would serve as a paradigm for the way they will need to make their other decisions.

This intervention uses elements from systemic, narrative and solution-focused approaches. Systems therapy recognizes the larger family histories and systems as impacting their current situation. By spending time reflecting on their families' cultural and religious histories, they are able to frame the issues in a much larger context, and see the present "problems" as being connected to larger systemic issues. These issues will also not be simply religious or cultural. For instance, a hope may be that Rachel might discover that part of her anxiety about raising Lily is connected to unpleasant memories she has about the way her mother raised her and fears she has when she sees herself behaving like her mother.

Rachel and John will use elements of narrative therapy to help re-story how they understand the nature of the choices they are making. This approach will them both to place their feelings and decisions within a different narrative of their lives, and potential narrative for the future. Where they may naturally have understood their decisions in a narrative where Lily will be confused and either Rachel, John, or both will sacrifice and have to feel uncomfortable and guilty about their choice, they can learn to interpret the story of their lives differently. They can now think more in terms of the opportunities to better understand and appreciate their cultural and religious experiences, and be able to have Lily experience those aspects which were meaningful to them, and to see their problems as really an opportunity as a family to create their own unique traditions, celebrations, and faith. Also, in keeping with a narrative approach, this process will help unite the family against the problem, rather than against one another.

A solution-focused positive and hopeful approach to therapy will be maintained. Where some of the information and insights gathered to better understand the family system can actually produce anxiety and a sense of helplessness, the object will be to use this information in a positive manner. There will not be a denial of the issues within the extended family and the ramifications of decisions they will make as a family, but these will be approached with a steadfast hope.

Also in keeping with a solution-focused therapy approach, the counselor will look for areas of success and leverage them with the idea that small changes can have large effects on the whole problem. Part of the intervention will be to start with having them fashion what their December holiday season will look like as a family. This is an easy exercise in which a family may experience success. The choices are tangible and involve many warm family memories. It is easy for a couple to speak positively about their experiences and discover what is important to them and why. Also, many of the meaningful experiences of this season are more cultural in nature and tend not to be necessarily offensive to the other partner. For example, Chanukah and Christmas are mostly home-based celebrations, not revolving around church or synagogue where there is greater potential for discomfort. Also, both holidays are very food-oriented. The Christian may not mind eating potato latkes and the Jewish partner may not mind making Christmas cookies. Often a mother will simply make some Chanukah-themed cookies along with the Christmas ones. But by having a family discover fun and success in working through their December season, it gives them hope and boosts skills necessary when dealing with their other, more complex, intercultural issues.

In order to begin to address less straight-forward issues, Rachel and John will work through the grid that has them separate their faith and culture decisions into five categories. They will discuss how they would like their daughter to think of herself in terms of identity, and how they want to think of themselves in terms of identity.

Secondly, they will discuss what they would like as a community base: Do they want a dual religious community, no religious community, or one dominant community, etc.?

The third area will be about how their religious and cultural identity should play itself out in the traditions within the home. That is, what holidays will they celebrate, what kinds of religious artwork and family rituals will they have? The fourth area they will discuss is the involvement of their extended families in their lives as well as how they will cope with any pressures from their extended families about the decisions they will make.

The final area of counseling will be working with them to think through their belief systems, helping them to understand and identify what they really believe about God and their respective religions, and enabling them to identify and compromise with one another about the spiritual practices they hope to see lived out in their home. This is where the counselor will specifically help them to differentiate their religious and cultural practices from their spiritual ones. They will also be shown and hopefully understand the opportunity they have for spiritual unity and consistency in their family through Jesus and how this might impact the other areas of the grid and their lives.

CHAPTER 5

COURSE OF THERAPY

John and Rachel met with the author for approximately ten sessions in the fall of 2009. They said that they were seeking help in dealing with issues in their interfaith relationship, particularly questions about how to raise their daughter Lily. At that point for Rachel, it was a decision to raise her “either Jewish or Christian.” She did not want Lily to be confused, so she wanted to make a decision and then just act on it. A lot of time was spent in these counseling sessions going into their family histories and exploring their understandings of the Jewish and Christian faiths. They were encouraged to put the child-raising question aside for a little bit to spend some more time understanding each other’s background and priorities. This was also a time to discover more about their own priorities, helping them understand what their own faiths meant to each of them. As mentioned before, John could not understand why Rachel could say she was “an atheist” and yet desire to go to synagogue on the High Holidays. He was frustrated because he could not understand the Hebrew, and could not understand her indifference to what was actually being said in the service. He asked Rachel, “Why would you want to go then?” It was a good opportunity to speak more about what it meant to be Jewish in terms of tribal identity, tradition and culture and how different this was from the ideas of faith and belief. Since John’s parents had “radical” conversions to Christianity and began a ministry, John saw belief as being very important. We spent some time specifically talking about the differences between religious communities and beliefs, while exploring both John and Rachel’s experiences.

As mentioned in a previous section, Rachel's interpretation that John was "ashamed" of her "because she was Jewish" was probed more deeply. John denied it but Rachel insisted that it was why John had not told his family for a long time that she was Jewish. John claims he just did not want to have those conversations with his parents. It is also possible that John might be concerned about his family's reaction due to John's prior failed marriage to a Jewish woman, but when asked about this John replied, "I hadn't thought about that," and did not seem to want to engage the question of why both Rachel and his first wife were Jewish.

With regard to John's reluctance to tell his family about Rachel's Jewishness, it was noted that there are potentially different cultural expectations about family conflict and transparency that may be potentially influencing this situation. In John's family, unity appears to be a high value, and thus information that might cause disunity is often never discussed. Rachel interpreted this unwillingness to discuss difficult matters as a sign that John's family was not very close. This tendency was compared to the common culture of a Jewish family, which often expresses its closeness through verbal conflict and airing differences. Ironically, in a Jewish family, to not argue can be seen as a sign of indifference and distance. Examples were given of another Jewish intercultural couple where the Gentile wife was disturbed by her husband arguing with his father on the phone all the time. Her husband looked mystified saying he never argued with his father. They came to see what the non-Jewish wife saw as "arguing" and conflict was simply her Jewish father-in-law's way of showing care and interest in their lives. This thought resonated with Rachel and seemed to help her understand John's family better. John also brought up some examples of Rachel's tendency to be direct and "confrontive." John and

Rachel laughed about the incidents, apparently satisfied that they had better insight now into their familial conflict patterns.

After eight sessions, the grid was introduced that divided their religious/cultural decisions into five areas: Identity, Community, Traditions, Belief and Extended Family., At the start of the sessions, Rachel was very resistant to the idea of embracing a more ambiguous approach to raising Lily. Rachel thought Lily needed to be either Jewish or Christian, and was adamant that she did not want any combination. She was convinced anything other than simply Jewish or Christian would be damaging to Lily. She thought this would make Lily confused and insecure growing up. It is possible that Rachel's own feelings about how her mother's erratic behavior affected her as a child influenced her concerns about raising Lily. Rachel acknowledged that this might have impacted her.

John and Rachel began to think and talk about the grid and what decisions they wanted to make, although they still struggled to make the differentiations between identity, community, traditions, and belief. John said it helped him "decompress" the decisions they had to make. He said it really helped them to experiment with the Chanukah/Christmas season to see what was important to them. Prior to this, they felt the pressure that their celebration could only be one way or another. They said it also changed the experience of planning the season from a sense of sacrifice to a fun exploration. Rachel and John had said in the past that they always felt that they were making compromises and sacrifices, and feeling guilty about what they did or did not do. They had conflict over whether to have a tree or go to church. But now, by working through their past experiences around the holidays, they were able to make it an enjoyable experience of exploration to find the right celebrations for them as a family.

When working through the grid, Rachel actually found it was the fifth area, dealing with extended family, which was surprisingly important to her. She was drawn to the love and community of John's family. She wanted Lily to experience their love and faith. She found their faith and the hope it gave all of them attractive. She thought it would be good for Lily to have that hope. But when probing this more, Rachel admitted that she felt scared that if her daughter believed in Jesus, "she becomes one of them." She said that she always had the sense that it is only "stupid people who believe in Jesus," and that "believing in God is not an intelligent thing to do."

At one point, Rachel started crying when asked if she would feel distanced from Lily if Lily embraced the faith of John's family. She said the idea of feeling separated from her daughter "tore her apart," yet she so wanted her daughter to be a part of John's family. It is important to remember here that Rachel did not have a stable family situation growing up, which may be what makes John's family all the more attractive.

John was confused as to why Rachel felt as strongly as she did about Christianity and how "separate" she would feel if they went to church. Rachel was asked if she could say the name Jesus, including Jesus' "last" name. She said she could and then said "Jesus Christ." Rachel said this was the "first time in her life" she had ever just said "Jesus Christ" apart from an occasional curse. She said it felt very strange, like she was doing something forbidden. John was shocked. When asked to describe her feelings more, she couldn't say, as she seemed genuinely surprised by her own reaction.

It is common for Jewish people to have a strong reaction to the name "Jesus Christ." For example, in every interfaith wedding the author has been a part of, it has been requested by the Jewish family that the name "Jesus" not be said. But when asked

why they have such an aversion to the name Jesus, most Jewish people do not know.

This is an example of how deeply held and yet hidden certain cultural behaviors can be.

In an attempt to shed light on Rachel's aversion to Jesus, it was necessary to give some history of the Jewish people's persecution in Christian countries to John. Examples such as the Crusades, the Inquisition, the pogroms in Eastern Europe, and the Holocaust were discussed, and how many of these persecutions were done in the name of Jesus. For example, prior to the Holocaust, Germans were encouraged to persecute Jews as "Christ killers" after leaving Good Friday services (Smith, 2010). The role Jesus plays in modern American Jewish identity was also discussed. Firstly, that American Jewish identity is less about what one believes in and more about what one does not believe in, namely Jesus. And secondly, due to the history of persecution, Jewish people have a fear and aversion to Jesus that reaches a subconscious level. There is a very common sense that as a Jew, to believe in Jesus is to become, in some way, a traitor to the Jewish people (Leher, 2004). These revelations were shocking to John, but Rachel said that for the first time she was beginning to understand her feelings about being Jewish and why it is important to her that Lily think of herself as Jewish. It also helped John understand how Rachel's mother could feel so strongly about Lily being raised Jewish, yet at the same time "do nothing Jewish" in her life, which he had been interpreting as hypocrisy.

Rachel and John joined two other Jewish intercultural couples for six weeks of group therapy, which the author organized. Each week they were given homework dealing with issues of family, identity, traditions, faith, and culture. As part of this group therapy homework, Rachel and John were asked to fashion a December holiday season for their family, and to discuss their own sense of identity and what they might want for

their daughter. Many of these items had been discussed previously through the use of the grid, but this gave them a chance to delve deeper into these issues.

John and Rachel found these exercises very helpful and were glad to be able to discuss them with other couples. It helped give them guidance about how to begin to construct their family. Through this experience they were able to realize that every family has to go through the process of establishing family traditions, even those with shared cultural backgrounds. Rachel and John saw that they were just another family seeking to combine two families who did things very differently .

At the beginning of one group session Rachel and John excitedly shared that they had made some decisions about how to raise Lily. They wanted her to be Jewish, yet they liked coming to church and Rachel wanted to continue doing that, although Rachel admitted that much of what was talked about at church did not make any sense to her. She thought they should belong to a synagogue as well. So they had begun to make decisions in four of the five areas that they were asked to think about. They were still struggling with the area of belief. They were not sure what they believed and how that would play out in their lives, but they had found places to make forward progress.

Most recently, John and Rachel called to say they were in crisis and needed counseling. They explained their current crisis by talking about a number of events that had happened over the past year. As they told the stories, they were not arguing, but they displayed some small differences. Their difficulties began the previous September when Rachel wanted to have another baby, and John was not ready to do that. Shortly thereafter Rachel suddenly went into menopause, which she said was already completed by the time of our meeting. She has since been dealing with a profound sadness at not

being able to have more children, and resentment towards John for not being willing to pursue what may have been her last chance for a child.

A short time later, a friend of Rachel's who had been in jail for a short time, began blackmailing Rachel and John, threatening to report them to the authorities for a situation where they illegally rented an apartment to him. Rachel felt betrayal from her friend, and also a real physical threat because Rachel said that this friend was violent. Rachel and John feared that if they went to the police about the blackmail, causing this friend to go back to prison, the friend would come and harm them. The blackmailing had been going on for the past four to five months, and Rachel and John eventually decided to pay him off.

In January, when the blackmailing began, Rachel had told John she was tired of trying to figure out when to get married and just wanted to elope. But John was firm in not wanting to elope. Rachel was hurt by John's unwillingness to elope. Rachel said that John made it sound like he was unsure of his desire to be married to Rachel. John claimed this was never the case, that he simply did not want to elope and that Rachel misunderstood him. Even as John claimed he knew he wanted to marry Rachel, Rachel was still not convinced this was true, and was certainly unconvinced that this was really John's feeling when she asked him to elope.

Around this same time, Rachel hired a friend of John's to work at her law firm. Rachel said that she felt hurt by John, and very vulnerable and frightened by the blackmailer and felt that John was emotionally unavailable to her. She also did not believe John could physically defend her family. Rachel began confiding in this new co-worker, and felt comforted by his strength. She said they began talking frequently and

there was a clear mutual attraction. This friend of John's then encouraged Rachel to leave John and have a relationship with him. Rachel said she was torn as to what to do. Rachel decided to stay with John. Rachel said she never was physically involved with this man, but she did have an "emotional affair" with him.

At this same time, John began to see a psychiatrist who prescribed Prozac, which "transformed" him. John said that suddenly he wanted to talk and "has feelings." Rachel referred to "old John" and "new John." She said she appreciates that "new John" likes to share with her now, but she finds herself resenting those years when he was emotionally shut down. Rachel said she still has "feelings" for this man at work. Rachel decided that she could no longer work with him, but would still take occasional phone calls from him. John was angry that Rachel was willing to receive his phone calls.

At this point, John was considering moving out. In the few weeks since that time, they have decided to stay together, but they are looking for ways to heal from some of the hurts of the past year, and Rachel wants to again find the feelings of love she had for John before. They have not been attending church, and feel that they have worked their initial concerns out as to how they were going to raise Lily.

The objective goals for therapy were satisfied. John and Rachel developed a much wider range of possibilities in raising Lily and they have a greater insight into both their own religious/cultural experience and that of one another. It was tempting to complete the course of treatment of John and Rachel and leave out their latest crisis. This would have indicated success in reaching the stated therapeutic goals for them.

Their present crisis is so completely different from the original issue they sought counseling about. This is a good reminder that Jewish intercultural couples may have

many conflicts and questions relating specifically to their cultural differences, but those places of discord and tension may also be symptoms of deeper problems, as they appear to be with Rachel and John.

However, it is difficult to know how much the difficult decisions and contrasting expectations from being in a Jewish intercultural relationship, contributed to or intensified their other relational problems. Rachel and John made successful entries into being able to understand the nature of their intercultural issues and navigate a course of dealing with their questions and differences in a constructive manner. It is perhaps a sign of progress that their intercultural issues were not part of their latest struggles.

As a Christian counselor, the author was able to speak to Rachel and John in an open way about his faith, and they understand the possibility they have to find spiritual unity in Jesus amidst their cultural differences. Rachel says she does not “fear” church the way she did, and she can understand now how an “intelligent” person could believe in Christianity. But she says she still doesn’t “believe” and does not know how she ever could. John also does not see a need to pursue his faith in any additional way than he already has. John and Rachel do want to continue to come to church when they can, but they do not want to pursue any other active way to understand Christianity at this time. They are, however, very interested in finding ways to forgive and reconcile with one another and want help in pursuing that.

APPENDIX A

FOUR EXAMPLES OF JEWISH INTERCULTURAL COUPLE HOMEWORK

Navigating the December Dilemma and March Dilemma

What traditions did your family keep in December? Spend some time thinking about this, everything from house decorations, foods you ate, religious aspects, relatives.

Which of those traditions meant the most to you? Why did they mean so much to you? Was it emotional, spiritual, relational etc.?

Which of those traditions would you want for your family? How does your partner feel about celebrating those traditions?

Are there traditions you didn't keep as a family that you would like to implement, either from your partner's tradition or that you have seen elsewhere?

After you do this for each of you, start to sketch out what a December might look like for you in your new family. Maybe separate it by the things you feel just have to happen, things that you would like but are not critical, and just nice low priority items.

Are there items you feel in conflict about? Talk more about those items and make sure you are able verbalize each other's concerns (i.e., "What I am hearing you say is that you are not really sure why you don't like Santa Claus so much, but it just gives you the *heebee geebees*"). Now brainstorm some potential ways to get around your conflict.

If you have the time and motivation, do this same exercise for Passover/Easter time.

Religious Family History

Goal: Learning about Each Other

Have a conversation where each of you:

1. Describe the religious behavior of your grandparents.
2. Describe the religious behavior of your parents.
3. Describe your own religious behavior and how it was transmitted to you.

Tips: Don't just name the religion of your grandparents (e.g., Irish Catholic, Orthodox Jew, etc.). Avoid broad stereotypes and tell the story of the people. Describe behaviors you observed and the meaning behind these behaviors and the impact they had in your family (e.g., "My mother said the rosary daily and I think for her it was... or meant... and when we watched her..." or "My father was passionate about Israel... so he would always...and this meant we ...").

Even if your grandparents were not religious, lack of religious behavior is also significant in shaping your identity. Were there things to "break" the flow, such as divorces or deaths that changed the behaviors of the family? For example, talk about the death of your grandmother who was at every family holiday, or how after the divorce you stopped really celebrating holidays.

Listen carefully to your partner and ask questions and encourage them to expand and tell you more.

Examining and Valuing your Personal Religious Upbringing

What religious community did you grow up in?

What were the parts you liked about it? What were the parts you didn't?

What would you most want your children to experience from it?

Were there religious experiences you wished you had that you want for your child?

How do your beliefs about God/reality align with the teachings of that community?

What do you want to teach your children about God? How do you want that to play out in your home?

Identity Issues

How do you think of yourself? What would you say if someone were to ask you, “What are you?” Are there a number of things you would say? (E.g., I am Jewish, I am American, I am a Lawyer, I am a vegetarian, etc.)

What is the most enduring and important sense of identity? (E.g., you may only be a vegetarian for a limited amount of a time, or a lawyer, but have you ever not been Jewish?)

How did you acquire that identity? Why do you think of yourself like that?

How do you want your child to think of themselves?

Do you and your partner agree?

What are the options? (e.g., half this, half that)

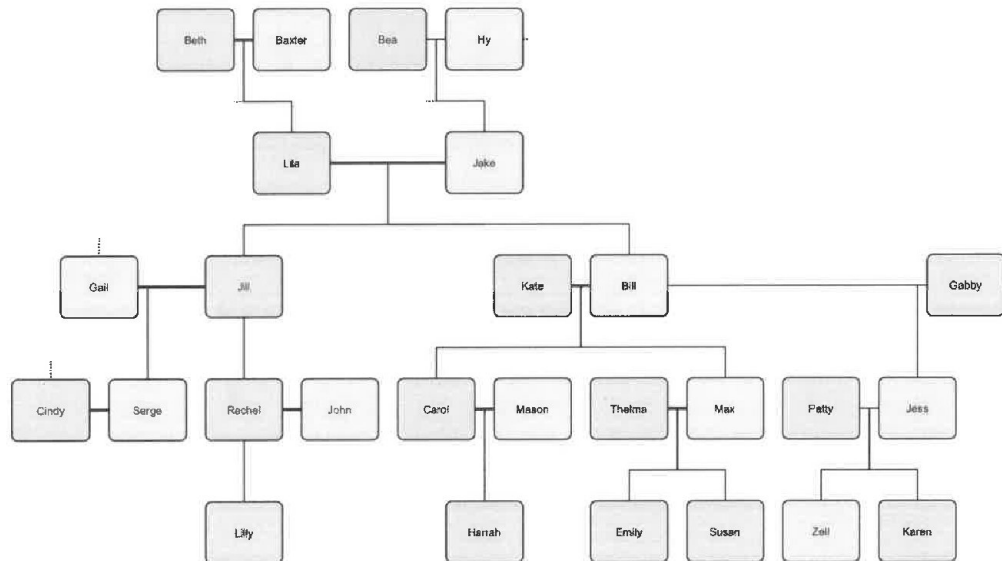
What are the problems with the various options? For example, if a Jewish identity, then how does your spouse feel about your child being not what they are? Who sacrifices? Do you want the child to say, “I am this, but my mother isn’t”?

If you decide on an identity for your child, how do you suppose that could happen? Do you think you can control your child’s sense of identity?

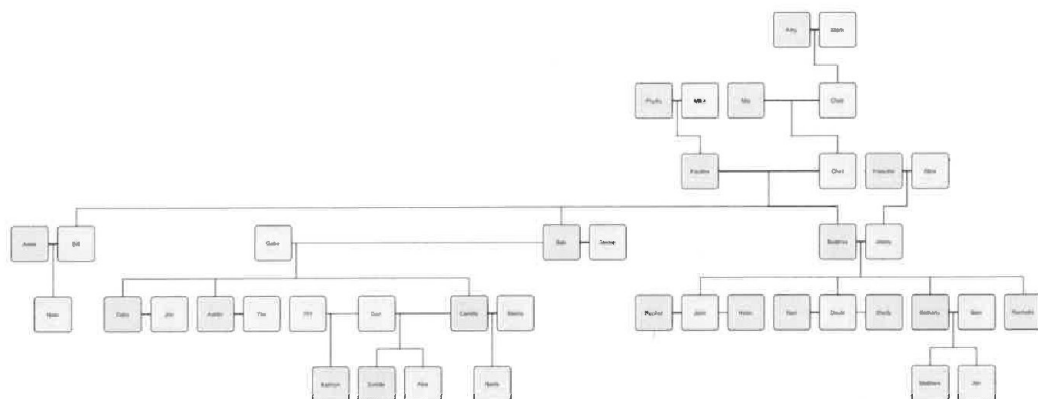
APPENDIX B

GENOGRAMS

Rachel's Family



John's Family



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VITA

Garrett R. Smith

Born September 22, 1965, San Francisco, California

Current Address

73 Winter Street, Watertown, MA 02472

Education

Doctor of Ministry in Marriage and Family Counseling, Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary. January 2008 – January 2010.
May 2011 Anticipated Graduation

Masters of Divinity, Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary
May 2008

Bachelor of Arts in Business Economics, University of California, Santa Barbara
March 1988

Ministry Experience

- | | |
|-----------|--|
| 2007-2011 | Celebrate Life, Watertown MA
Founding Director of Ministry to Jewish Intercultural Families |
| 2007-2011 | Newton Presbyterian Church, Newton, Ma
Director of Spiritual Formation and Outreach |
| 1995-2007 | Jews for Jesus, San Francisco, CA
Branch Director, Boston, Washington DC |
| 2003-2011 | Sar Shalom Messianic Congregation, Natick, MA
Teaching Elder |
| 1992-1993 | Bethel Mission Hostel, Haifa, Israel |

Author of *Comfortably Jewish: Practical Ways to Enjoy Your Family Heritage* (2010)
San Francisco, CA: Purple Pomegranate Productions.